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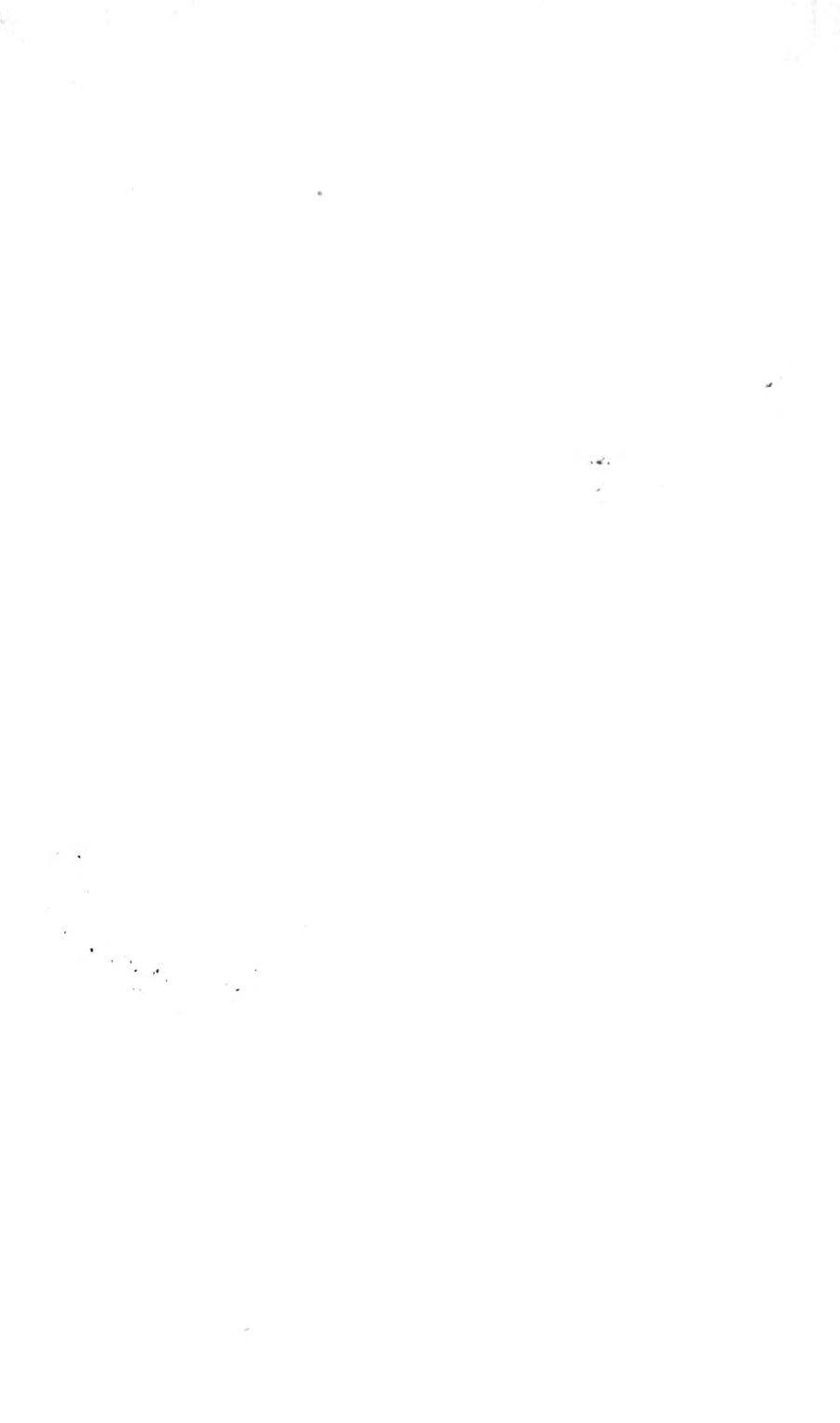
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# THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK

CHAPTERS IX. TO XVI

BY

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## THE TRANSFIGURATION

'And after six days Jesus taketh with Him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and He was transfigured before them. 3. And His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. 4. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus. 5. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. 6. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid. 7. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son: hear Him. 8. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves. 9. And as they came down from the mountain, He charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of Man were risen from the dead. 10. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean. 11. And they asked Him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come? 12. And He answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of Man, that He must suffer many things, and be set at nought. 13. But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him.'—MARK ix. 2-13.

ALL three Evangelists are careful to date the Transfiguration by a reference to the solemn new teaching at Cæsarea, and Mark's 'six days' plainly cover the same time as Luke's 'eight'—the former reckoning excluding in the count, and the latter including, the days on which the two incidents occurred. If we would understand the Transfiguration, then, we must look at it as the sequel to Jesus' open announcement of His death. His seeking the seclusion of the hills, attended only by the innermost group of the faithful three, is a touching token of the strain to which that week had subjected Him. How Peter's heart must have filled with thankfulness that, notwithstanding the stern rebuke, he was taken with the other two! There were

three stages in the complex incident which we call the Transfiguration—the change in Jesus' appearance, the colloquy with Moses and Elijah, and the voice from the cloud.

Luke, who has frequent references to Jesus' prayers, tells us that the change in our Lord's countenance and raiment took place 'as He prayed'; and probably we are reverently following his lead if we think of Jesus' prayer as, in some sense, the occasion of the glorious change. So far as we know, this was the only time when mortal eyes saw Him absorbed in communion with the Father. It was only 'when He ceased praying' in a certain place that 'they came to Him' asking to be taught to pray (Luke xi. 1); and in Gethsemane the disciples slept while He prayed beneath the olives quivering in the moonlight. It may be that what the three then saw did not occur then only. 'In such an hour of high communion with' His Father the elevated spirit may have more than ordinarily illuminated the pure body, and the pure body may have been more than ordinarily transparent. The brighter the light, fed by fragrant oil within an alabaster lamp, the more the alabaster will glow. Faint foreshadowings of the spirit's power to light up the face with unearthly beauty of holiness are not unknown among us. It may be that the glory which always shone in the depths of His perfectly holy manhood rose, as it were, to the surface for that one time, a witness of what He really was, a prophecy of what humanity may become.

Did Jesus will His transfiguration, or did it come about without His volition, or perhaps even without His consciousness? Did it continue during all the time on the mountain, or did it pass when the second stage of the incident began? We cannot tell. Matthew and

Mark both say that Jesus was transfigured 'before' the three, as if the making visible of the glory had special regard to them. It may be that Jesus, like Moses, 'knew not that the skin of His face shone'; at all events, it was the second stage of the incident, the conversation with Elijah and Moses, that had a special message of strength for Him. The first and third stages were, apparently, intended for the three and for us all; and the first is a revelation, not only of the veiled glory that dwelt in Jesus, but of the beauty that may pass into a holy face, and of the possibilities of a bodily frame becoming a 'spiritual body,' the adequate organ and manifestation of a perfect spirit. Paul teaches the prophetic aspect of the Transfiguration when he says that Jesus 'shall *change* the body of our humiliation that it may be fashioned like unto the body of His glory.'

Luke adds two very significant points to the accounts by Matthew and Mark—namely, the disciples' sleep, and the subject on which Moses and Elijah talked with Jesus. Mark lays the main stress on the fact that the two great persons of the old economy, its founder and its restorer, the legislator and the chief of the prophets, came from the dim region to which one of them had passed in a chariot of fire, and stood by the transfigured Christ, as if witnessing to Him as the greater, to whom their ministries were subordinate, and in whom their teachings centred. Jesus is the goal of all previous revelation, mightier than the mightiest who are honoured by being His attendants. He is the Lord both of the dead and of the living, and the 'spirits of just men made perfect' bow before Him, and reverently watch His work on earth.

So much did that appearance proclaim to the mortal

three, but their slumber showed that they were not principally concerned, and that the other three had things to speak which they were not fit to hear. The theme was the same which had been, a week before, spoken to them, and had doubtless been the subject of all Jesus' teachings for these 'six days.' No doubt, their horror at the thought, and His necessary insistence on it, had brought Him to need strengthening. And these two came, as did the angel in Gethsemane, and, like him, in answer to Christ's prayer, to bring the sought-for strength. How different it would be to speak to them 'of the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem,' from speaking to the reluctant, protesting Twelve! And how different to listen to them speaking of that miracle of divine love expressed in human death from the point of view of the 'principalities and powers in heavenly places,' as over against the remonstrances and misunderstandings with which He had been struggling for a whole week! The appearance of Moses and Elijah teaches us the relation of Jesus to all former revelation, the interest of the dwellers in heavenly light in the Cross, and the need which Jesus felt for strengthening to endure it.

Peter's foolish words, half excused by his being scarcely awake, may be passed by with the one remark that it was like him to say something, though he did not know what to say, and that it would therefore have been wise to say nothing.

The third part of this incident, the appearance of the cloud and the voice from it, was for the disciples. Luke tells us that it was a 'bright' cloud, and yet it 'overshadowed them.' That sets us on the right track and indicates that we are to think of the cloud of glory, which was the visible token of the divine presence, the

cloud which shone lambent between the cherubim, the cloud which at last 'received Him out of their sight.' Luke tells, too, that 'they entered into it.' Who entered? Moses and Elijah had previously 'departed from Him.' Jesus and the disciples remained, and we cannot suppose that the three could have passed into that solemn glory, if He had not led them in. In that sacred moment He was 'the way,' and keeping close to Him, mortal feet could pass into the glory which even a Moses had not been fit to behold. The spiritual significance of the incident seems to require the supposition that, led by Jesus, they entered the cloud. They were men, therefore they were afraid; Jesus was with them, therefore they stood within the circle of that light and lived.

The voice repeated the attestation of Jesus as the 'beloved Son' of the Father, which had been given at the baptism, but with the addition, 'Hear Him,' which shows that it was now meant for the disciples, not, as at the baptism, for Jesus Himself. While the command to listen to His voice as to the voice from the cloud is perfectly general, and lays all His words on us as all God's words, it had special reference to the disciples, and that in regard to the new teaching which had so disturbed them—the teaching of the necessity for His death. 'The offence of the Cross' began with the first clear statement of it, and in the hearts that loved Him best and came most near to understanding Him. To fail in accepting His teaching that it 'behoved the Son of Man to suffer,' is to fail in accepting it in the most important matter. There are sounds in nature too low-pitched to be audible to untrained ears, and the message of the Cross is unheard unless the ears of the deaf are unstopped. If we do not hear Jesus when He speaks

of His passion, we may almost as well not hear Him at all.

Moses and Elijah had vanished, having borne their last testimony to Jesus. Peter had wished to keep them beside Jesus, but that could not be. Their highest glory was to fade in His light. They came, they disappeared; He remained—and remains. ‘They saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.’ So should it be for us in life. So may it be with us in death! ‘Hear Him,’ for all other voices are but for a time, and die into silence, but Jesus speaks for eternity, and ‘His words shall not pass away.’ When time is ended, and the world’s history is all gathered up into its final issue, His name shall stand out alone as Author and End of all.

## **‘THIS IS MY BELOVED SON : HEAR HIM’**

**‘And there was a cloud that overshadowed them : and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son : hear Him.’—MARK ix. 7.**

WITH regard to the first part of these words spoken at the Transfiguration, they open far too large and wonderful a subject for me to do more than just touch with the tip of my finger, as it were, in passing, because the utterance of the divine words, ‘This is My beloved Son,’ in all the depth of their meaning and loftiness, is laid as the foundation of the two words that come after, which, for us, are the all-important things here. And so I would rather dwell upon them than upon the mysteries of the first part, but a sentence must be spared. If we accept this story before us as the divine attestation of the mystery of the person and nature of Jesus Christ, we must take the words to mean—as these disciples, no doubt, took them to mean—something pointing to a unique and solitary revelation which He bore to the Divine Majesty. We have to see in them the confirmation of the great truth that the manhood of Jesus Christ was the supernatural creation of a direct divine power. ‘Conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary’; therefore, ‘that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.’ And we have to go, as I take it, farther back than the earthly birth, and to say, ‘No man hath seen God at any time—the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father.’ He was the Son here by human birth, and was in the bosom of the Father all through that human life. ‘He hath declared Him,’ and so not only is there here the testi-

mony to the miraculous incarnation, and to the true and proper Divinity and Deity of Jesus Christ, but there is also the witness to the perfectness of His character in the great word, 'This is My beloved Son,' which points us to an unbroken communion of love between Him and the Father, which tells us that in the depths of that divine nature there has been a constant play of mutual love, which reveals to us that in His humanity there never was anything that came as the faintest film of separation between His will and the will of the Father, between His heart and the heart of God.

But this revelation of the mysterious personality of the divine Son, the perfect harmony between Him and God, is here given as the ground of the command that follows: 'Hear Him.' God's voice bids you listen to Christ's voice—God's voice bids you listen to Christ's voice as His voice. Listen to Him when He speaks to you about God—do not trust your own fancy, do not trust your own fear, do not trust the dictates of your conscience, do not consult man, do not listen to others, do not speculate about the mysteries of the earth and the heavens, but go to Him, and listen to the only begotten Son in the bosom of the Father. He declares unto us God; in Him alone we have certain knowledge of a loving Father in heaven. Hear Him when He tells us of God's tenderness and patience and love. Hear Him above all when He says to us, 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.' Hear Him when He says, 'The Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for many.' Hear Him when He speaks of Himself as Judge of you and me and all the world, and when He says, 'The Son of Man shall come in His glory, and before Him shall



be gathered all nations.' Hear Him then. Hear Him when He calls you to Himself. Hear Him when He says to you, 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden.' Hear Him when He says, 'If any man come unto Me he shall never thirst.' Hear Him when He says, 'Cast your burden upon Me, and I will sustain you.' Hear Him when He commands. Hear Him when He says, 'If ye love Me keep My commandments,' and when He says, 'Abide in Me and I in you,' hear Him then. 'In all time of our tribulation, in all time of our well-being, in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment,' let us listen to Him.

Dear friends, there is no rest anywhere else; there is no peace, no pleasure, no satisfaction—except close at His side. 'Speak Lord! for Thy servant heareth.' 'To whom shall we go but unto Thee? Thou hast the words of eternal life.' Look how these disciples, grovelling there on their faces, were raised by the gentle hand laid upon their shoulder, and the blessed voice that brought them back to consciousness, and how, as they looked about them with dazed eyes, all was gone. The vision, the cloud, Moses and Elias—the lustre and radiance and the dread voice were past, and everything was as it used to be. Christ stood alone there like some solitary figure relieved against a clear daffodil sky upon some extended plain, and there was nothing else to meet the eye but He. Christ is there, and in Him is all.

That is a summing up of all Divine revelation. 'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath, in these last days, spoken unto us by His Son.' Moses dies, Elijah fades, clouds and symbols and voices and all mortal things vanish, but Jesus Christ stands be-

fore us, the manifest God, for ever and ever, the sole illumination of the world. It is also a summing up of all earthly history. All other people go. The beach of time is strewn with wrecked reputations and forgotten glories. And I am not ashamed to say that I believe that, as the ages grow, and the world gets further away in time from the Cross upon Calvary, more and more everything else will sink beneath the horizon, and Christ alone be left to fill the past as He fills the present and the future.

We may make that scene the picture of our lives. Distractions and temptations that lie all round us are ever seeking to drag us away. There is no peace anywhere but in having Christ only—my only pattern, my only hope, my only salvation, my only guide, my only aim, my only friend. The solitary Christ is the sufficient Christ, and that for ever. Take Him for your only friend, and you need none other. Then at death there may be a brief spasm of darkness, a momentary fear, perchance, but then the touch of a Brother's hand will be upon us as we lie there prone in the dust, and we shall lift up our eyes, and lo! life's illusions are gone, and life's noises are fallen dumb, and we 'see no man any more, save Jesus only,' with ourselves.

## JESUS ONLY!

**'They saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.'**—MARK ix. 8.

THE Transfiguration was the solemn inauguration of Jesus for His sufferings and death.

Moses, the founder, and Elijah, the restorer, of the Jewish polity, the great Lawgiver and the great Prophet, were present. The former had died and been mysteriously buried, the latter had been translated without 'seeing death.' So both are visitors from the unseen world, appearing to own that Jesus is the Lord of that dim land, and that there they draw their life from Him. The conversation is about Christ's 'decease,' the wonderful event which was to constitute Him Lord of the living and of the dead. The divine voice of command, 'Hear Him!' gives the meaning of their disappearance. At that voice they depart and Jesus is left alone. The scene is typical of the ultimate issue of the world's history. The King's name only will at last be found inscribed on the pyramid. Typical, too, is it not, of a Christian's blessed death? When the 'cloud' is past no man is seen any more but 'Jesus only.'

### I. The solitary Saviour.

The disciples are left alone with the divine Saviour.

1. He is alone in His nature. 'Son of God.'

2. He is alone in the sinlessness of His manhood.

'My Beloved Son!'

3. He is alone as God's Voice to men. 'Hear Him!'

The solitary Saviour, because sufficient. 'Thou, O Christ, art all I want.'

Sufficient, too, for ever.

**His life is eternal.**

**His love is eternal.**

**The power of His Cross is eternal.**

**II. The vanishing witnesses.**

1. The connection of the past with Christ. The authority of the two representatives of the Old Covenant was only (a) derived and subordinate; (b) prophetic; (c) transient.

2. The thought may be widened into that of the relation of all teachers and guides to Jesus Christ.

3. The two witness to the relation of the unseen world to Jesus Christ.

(a) Its inhabitants are undying.

(b) Are subject to the sway of Jesus.

(c) Are expectantly waiting a glorious future.

4. They witness to the central point of Christ's work — 'His decease.' This great event is the key to the world's history.

**III. The waiting disciples.**

1. What Christian life should be. Giving Him our sole trust and allegiance.

(a) Seeing Him in all things.

(b) Constant communion. 'Abide in Me.'

(c) Using everything as help to Him.

2. What Christian death may become.

## CHRIST'S LAMENT OVER OUR FAITHLESSNESS

'He answereth him and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?'—MARK ix. 19.

THERE is a very evident, and, I think, intentional contrast between the two scenes, of the Transfiguration, and of this healing of the maniac boy. And in nothing is the contrast more marked than in the demeanour of these enfeebled and unbelieving Apostles, as contrasted with the rapture of devotion of the other three, and with the lowly submission and faith of Moses and Elias. Perhaps, too, the difference between the calm serenity of the mountain, and the hell-tortured misery of the plain—between the converse with the sainted perfected dead, and the converse with their unworthy successors—made Christ feel more sharply and poignantly than He ordinarily did His disciples' slowness of apprehension and want of faith. At any rate, it does strike one as remarkable that the only occasion on which there came from His lips anything that sounded like impatience and a momentary flash of indignation was, when in sharpest contrast with 'This is my beloved Son: hear Him,' He had to come down from the mountain to meet the devil-possessed boy, the useless agony of the father, the sneering faces of the scribes, and the impotence of the disciples. Looking on all this, He turns to His followers—for it is to the Apostles that the text is spoken, and not to the crowd outside—with this most remarkable exclamation: 'O faithless generation! how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?'

Now, I said that these words at first sight looked

almost like a momentary flash of indignation, as if for once a spot had come on His pallid cheek—a spot of anger—but I do not think that we shall find it so if we look a little more closely.

The first thing that seems to be in the words is not anger, indeed, but a very distinct and very pathetic expression of Christ's infinite pain, because of man's faithlessness. The element of personal sorrow is most obvious here. It is not only that He is sad for their sakes that they are so unreceptive, and He can do so little for them—I shall have something to say about that presently—but that He feels for Himself, just as we do in our poor humble measure, the chilling effect of an atmosphere where there is no sympathy. All that ever the teachers and guides and leaders of the world have in this respect had to bear—all the misery of opening out their hearts in the frosty air of unbelief and rejection—Christ endured. All that men have ever felt, of how hard it is to keep on working when not a soul understands them, when not a single creature believes in them, when there is no one that will accept their message, none that will give them credit for pure motives—Jesus Christ had to feel, and that in an altogether singular degree. There never was such a lonely soul on this earth as His, just because there never was one so pure and loving. 'The little hills rejoice *together*,' as the Psalm says, 'on every side,' but the great Alpine peak is alone there, away up amongst the cold and the snows. Thus lived the solitary Christ, the uncomprehended Christ, the unaccepted Christ. Let us see in this exclamation of His how humanly, and yet how divinely, He felt the loneliness to which His love and purity condemned Him.

The plain felt soul-chilling after the blessed com-

munion of the mountain. There was such a difference between Moses and Elias and the voice that said, 'This is My beloved Son: hear Him,' and the disbelief and slowness of spiritual apprehension of the people down below there, that no wonder that for once the pain that He generally kept absolutely down and silent, broke the bounds even of His restraint, and shaped for itself this pathetic utterance: 'How long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?'

Dear friends, here is 'a little window through which we may see a great matter' if we will only think of how all that solitude, and all that sorrow of uncomprehended aims, was borne lovingly and patiently, right away on to the very end, for every one of us. I know that there are many of the aspects of Christ's life in which Christ's griefs tell more on the popular apprehension; but I do not know that there is one in which the title of 'The Man of Sorrows' is to all deeper thinking more pathetically vindicated than in this—the solitude of the uncomprehended and the unaccepted Christ and His pain at His disciples' faithlessness.

And then do not let us forget that in this short sharp cry of anguish—for it is that—there may be detected by the listening ear not only the tone of personal hurt, but the tone of disappointed and thwarted love. Because of their unbelief He knew that they could not receive what He desired to give them. We find Him more than once in His life, hemmed in, hindered, balked of His purpose, thwarted, as I may say, in His design, simply because there was no one with a heart open to receive the rich treasure that He was ready to pour out. He had to keep it locked up in His own spirit, else it would have been wasted and spilled upon the ground. 'He could do no mighty works

there because of their unbelief'; and here He is standing in the midst of the men that knew Him best, that understood Him most, that were nearest to Him in sympathy; but even they were not ready for all this wealth of affection, all this infinitude of blessing, with which His heart is charged. They offered no place to put it. They shut up the narrow cranny through which it might have come, and so He has to turn from them, bearing it away unbestowed, like some man who goes out in the morning with his seed-basket full, and finds the whole field where he would fain have sown covered already with springing weeds or encumbered with hard rock, and has to bring back the germs of possible life to bless and fertilise some other soil. 'He that goeth forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with joy'; but He that comes back weeping, bearing the precious seed that He found no field to sow in, knows a deeper sadness, which has in it no prophecy of joy. It is wonderfully pathetic and beautiful, I think, to see how Jesus Christ knew the pains of wounded love that cannot get expressed because there is not heart to receive it.

Here I would remark, too, before I go to another point, that these two elements—that of personal sorrow and that of disappointed love and baulked purposes—continue still, and are represented as in some measure felt by Him now. It was to disciples that He said, 'O faithless generation!' He did not mean to charge them with the entire absence of all confidence, but He did mean to declare that their poor, feeble faith, such as it was, was not worth naming in comparison with the abounding mass of their unbelief. There was one spark of light in them, and there was also a great



heap of green wood that had not caught the flame and only smoked instead of blazing. And so He said to them, 'O *faithless* generation!'

Ay, and if He came down here amongst us now, and went through the professing Christians in this land, to how many of us—regard being had to the feebleness of our confidence and the strength of our unbelief—He would have to say the same thing, 'O *faithless* generation!'

The version of that clause in Matthew and Luke adds a significant word,—'faithless and *perverse* generation.' The addition carries a grave lesson, as teaching us that the two characteristics are inseparably united; that the want of faith is morally a crime and sin; that unbelief is at once the most tragic manifestation of man's perverse will, and also in its turn the source of still more obstinate and wide-spreading evil. Blindness to His light and rejection of His love, He treats as the very head and crown of sin. Like intertwining snakes, the loathly heads are separate; but the slimy convolutions are twisted indistinguishably together, and all unbelief has in it the nature of perversity, as all perversity has in it the nature of unbelief. 'He will convince the world of sin, because they believe not on Me.'

May we venture to say, as we have already hinted, that all this pain is in some mysterious way still inflicted on His loving heart? Can it be that every time we are guilty of unbelieving, unsympathetic rejection of His love, we send a pang of real pain and sorrow into the heart of Christ? It is a strange, solemn thought. There are many difficulties which start up, if we at all accept it. But still it does appear as if we could scarcely believe in His perpetual manhood, or think of His love as being in any real sense a

human love, without believing that He sorrows when we sin; and that we can grieve, and wound, and cause to recoil upon itself, as it were, and close up that loving and gracious Spirit that delights in being met with answering love. If we may venture to take our love as in any measure analogous to His—and unless we do, His love is to us a word without meaning—we may believe that it is so. Do not we know that the purer our love, and the more it has purified us, the more sensitive it becomes, even while the less suspicious it becomes? Is not the purest, most unselfish, highest love, that by which the least failure in response is felt most painfully? Though there be no anger, and no change in the love, still there is a pang where there is an inadequate perception, or an unworthy reception, of it. And Scripture seems to countenance the belief that Divine Love, too, may know something, in some mysterious fashion, like that feeling, when it warns us, ‘Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.’ So *we* may venture to say, Grieve not the Christ of God, who redeems us; and remember that we grieve Him most when we will not let Him pour His love upon us, but turn a sullen, unresponsive unbelief towards His pleading grace, as some glacier shuts out the sunshine from the mountain-side with its thick-ribbed ice.

Another thought, which seems to me to be expressed in this wonderful exclamation of our Lord's, is—that this faithlessness bound Christ to earth, and kept Him here. As there is not anger, but only pain, so there is also, I think, not exactly impatience, but a desire to depart, coupled with the feeling that He cannot leave them till they have grown stronger in faith. And that feeling is increased by the experience of their utter helplessness

and shameful discomfiture during His brief absence. They had shown that they were not fit to be trusted alone. He had been away for a day up in the mountain there, and though they did not build an altar to any golden calf, like their ancestors, when their leader was absent, still when He comes back He finds things all gone wrong because of the few hours of His absence. What would they do if He were to go away from them altogether? They would never be able to stand it at all. It is impossible that He should leave them thus—raw, immature. The plant has not yet grown sufficiently strong to take away the prop round which it climbed. ‘How long must I be with you?’ says the loving Teacher, who is prepared ungrudgingly to give His slow scholars as much time as they need to learn their lesson. He is not impatient, but He desires to finish the task; and yet He is ready to let the scholars’ dulness determine the duration of His stay. Surely that is wondrous and heart-touching love, that Christ should let their slowness measure the time during which He should linger here, and refrain from the glory which He desired. We do not know all the reasons which determined the length of our Lord’s life upon earth, but this was one of them,—that He could not go away until He had left these men strong enough to stand by themselves, and to lay the foundations of the Church. Therefore He yielded to the plea of their very faithlessness and backwardness, and with this wonderful word of condescension and appeal bade them say for how many more days He must abide in the plain, and turn His back on the glories that had gleamed for a moment on the mountain of transfiguration.

In this connection, too, is it not striking to notice

how long His short life and ministry appeared to our Lord Himself? There is to me something very pathetic in that question He addressed to one of His Apostles near the end of His pilgrimage: 'Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me?' It was not so very long—three years, perhaps, at the outside—and much less, if we take the shortest computation; and yet to Him it had been long. The days had seemed to go tardily. He longed that the 'fire' which He came to fling on earth were already 'kindled,' and the moments seemed to drop so slowly from the urn of time. But neither the holy longing to consummate His work by the mystery of His passion, to which more than one of His words bear witness, nor the not less holy longing to be glorified with 'the glory which He had with the Father before the world was,' which we may reverently venture to suppose in Him, could be satisfied till his slow scholars were wiser, and His feeble followers stronger.

And then again, here we get a glimpse into the depth of Christ's patient forbearance. We might read these other words of our text, 'How long shall I suffer you?' with such an intonation as to make them almost a threat that the limits of forbearance would soon be reached, and that He was not going to 'suffer them' much longer. Some commentators speak of them as expressing 'holy indignation,' and I quite believe that there is such a thing, and that on other occasions it was plainly spoken in Christ's words. But I fail to catch the tone of it here. To me this plaintive question has the very opposite of indignation in its ring. It sounds rather like a pledge that as long as they need forbearance they will get it; but, at the same time, a question of 'how long' that is to be. It implies the

inexhaustible riches and resources of His patient mercy. And Oh, dear brethren! that endless forbearance is the only refuge and ground of hope we have. *His perfect charity 'is not soon angry; beareth all things,' and 'never faileth.'* To it we have all to make the appeal—

‘Though I have most unthankful been  
Of all that e'er Thy grace received;  
Ten thousand times Thy goodness seen,  
Ten thousand times Thy goodness grieved;  
Yet, Lord, the chief of sinners spare.’

And, thank God! we do not make our appeal in vain.

There is rebuke in His question, but how tender a rebuke it is! He rebukes without anger. He names the fault plainly. He shows distinctly His sorrow, and does not hide the strain on His forbearance. That is His way of cure for His servants' faithlessness. It was His way on earth; it is His way in heaven. To us, too, comes the loving rebuke of this question, ‘How long shall I suffer you?’

Thank God that our answer may be cast into the words of His own promise: ‘I say not unto thee, until seven times; but until seventy times seven.’ ‘Bear with me till Thou hast perfected me; and then bear me to Thyself, that I may be with Thee for ever, and grieve Thy love no more.’ So may it be, for ‘with Him is plenteous redemption,’ and His forbearing ‘mercy endureth for ever.’

## THE OMNIPOTENCE OF FAITH

'Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.'—MARK ix. 23.

THE necessity and power of faith is the prominent lesson of this narrative of the healing of a demoniac boy, especially as it is told by the Evangelist Mark. The lesson is enforced by the actions of all the persons in the group, except the central figure, Christ. The disciples could not cast out the demon, and incur Christ's plaintive rebuke, which is quite as much sorrow as blame: 'O faithless generation! how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?' And then, in the second part of the story, the poor father, heart-sick with hope deferred, comes into the foreground. The whole interest is shifted to him, and more prominence is given to the process by which his doubting spirit is led to trust, than to that by which his son is healed.

There is something very beautiful and tender in Christ's way of dealing with him, so as to draw him to faith. He begins with the question, 'How long is it ago since this came unto him?' and so induces him to tell all the story of the long sorrow, that his burdened heart might get some ease in speaking, and also that the feeling of the extremity of the necessity, deepened by the very dwelling on all his boy's cruel sufferings, might help him to the exercise of faith. Truly 'He knew what was in man,' and with tenderness born of perfect knowledge and perfect love, He dealt with sore and sorrowful hearts. This loving artifice of consolation, which drew all the story from willing lips, is one more little token of His gentle mode of healing. And

it is profoundly wise, as well as most tender. Get a man thoroughly to know his need, and vividly to feel his helpless misery, and you have carried him a long way towards laying hold of the refuge from it.

How wise and how tender the question is, is proved by the long circumstantial answer, in which the pent-up trouble of a father's heart pours itself out at the tiny opening which Christ has made for it. He does not content himself with the simple answer, 'Of a child,' but with the garrulousness of sorrow that has found a listener that sympathises, goes on to tell all the misery, partly that he may move his hearer's pity, but more in sheer absorption with the bitterness that had poisoned the happiness of his home all these years. And then his graphic picture of his child's state leads him to the plaintive cry, in which his love makes common cause with his son, and unites both in one wretchedness. 'If thou canst do anything, have compassion on *us* and help *us*.'

Our Lord answers that appeal in the words of our text. There are some difficulties in the rendering and exact force of these words with which I do not mean to trouble you. We may accept the rendering as in our Bible, with a slight variation in the punctuation. If we take the first clause as an incomplete sentence, and put a break between it and the last words, the meaning will stand out more clearly: 'If thou canst believe—all things are possible to him that believeth.' We might paraphrase it somewhat thus: Did you say 'If thou canst do anything'? That is the wrong 'if.' There is no doubt about that. The only 'if' in the question is another one, not about me, but about you. 'If *thou* canst believe—' and then the incomplete sentence might be supposed to be ended with some such

phrase as 'That is the only question. If thou canst believe—all depends on that. If thou canst believe, thy son will be healed,' or the like. Then, in order to explain and establish what He had meant in the half-finished saying, He adds the grand, broad statement, on which the demand for the man's faith as the only condition of his wish being answered reposes: 'All things are possible to him that believeth.'

That wide statement is meant, I suppose, for the disciples as well as for the father. 'All things are possible' both in reference to benefits to be received, and in reference to power to be exercised. 'If thou canst believe, poor suppliant father, thou shalt have thy desire. If thou canst believe, poor devil-ridden son, thou shalt be set free. If ye can believe, poor baffled disciples, you will be masters of the powers of evil.'

Do you remember another 'if' with which Christ was once besought? 'There came a leper to Him, beseeching Him, and kneeling down to Him, and saying unto Him, If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.' In some respects that man had advanced beyond the father in our story, for he had no doubt at all about Christ's power, and he spoke to Him as 'Lord.' But he was somehow not quite sure about Christ's heart of pity. On the other hand, the man in our narrative has no doubt about Christ's compassion. He may have seen something of His previous miracles, or there may still have been lying on our Lord's countenance some of the lingering glory of the Transfiguration—as indeed the narrative seems to hint, in its emphatic statement of the astonishment and reverential salutations of the crowd when He approached—or the tenderness of our Lord's listening sympathy may have made him feel



sure of His willingness to help. At any rate, the leper's 'if' has answered itself for him. His own lingering doubt, Christ waives aside as settled. His 'if' is answered for ever. So these two 'ifs' in reference to Christ are beyond all controversy; His power is certain, and His love. The third 'if' remains, the one that refers to us—'If thou canst believe'; all hinges on that, for 'all things are possible to him that believeth.'

Here, then, we have our Lord telling us that faith is omnipotent. That is a bold word; He puts no limitations; 'all things are possible.' I think that to get the true force of these words we should put alongside of them the other saying of our Lord's, 'With God all things are possible.' That is the foundation of the grand prerogative in our text. The power of faith is the consequence of the power of God. All things are possible to Him; therefore, all things are possible to me, believing in Him. If we translate that into more abstract words, it just comes to the principle that the power of faith consists in its taking hold of the power of God. It is omnipotent because it knits us to Omnipotence. Faith is nothing in itself, but it is that which attaches us to God, and then His power flows into us. Screw a pipe on to a water main and turn a handle, and out flows the water through the pipe and fills the empty vessel. Faith is as impotent in itself as the hollow water pipe is, only it is the way by which the connection is established between the fulness of God and the emptiness of man. By it divinity flows into humanity, and we have a share even in the divine Omnipotence. 'My strength is made perfect in weakness.' In itself nothing, it yet grasps God, and therefore by it we are strong, because by it we lay hold of His strength. Great and wonderful is the grace thus given to us, poor,

struggling, sinful men, that, looking up to the solemn throne, where He sits in His power, we have a right to be sure that a true participation in His greatness is granted to us, if once our hearts are fastened to Him.

And there is nothing arbitrary nor mysterious in this flowing of divine power into our hearts on condition of our faith. It is the condition of possessing Christ, and in Christ, salvation, righteousness, and strength, not by any artificial appointment, but in the very nature of things. There is no other way possible by which God could give men what they receive through their faith, except only their faith.

In all trust in God there are two elements: a sense of need and of evil and weakness, and a confidence more or less unshaken and strong in Him, His love and power and all-sufficiency; and unless both of these two be in the heart, it is, in the nature of things, impossible, and will be impossible to all eternity, that purity and strength and peace and joy, and all the blessings which Christ delights to give to faith, should ever be ours.

Unbelief, distrust of Him, which separates us from Him and closes the heart fast against His grace, must cut us off from that which it does not feel that it needs, nor cares to receive; and must interpose a non-conducting medium between us and the electric influences of His might. When Christ was on earth, man's want of faith dammed back His miracle-working power, and paralysed His healing energy. How strange that paradox sounds at first hearing, which brings together Omnipotence and impotence, and makes men able to counter-work the loving power of Christ. 'He could there do no mighty work.' The Evangelist intends a paradox, for he uses two kindred words to express the inability and the mighty work; and we might para-

phrase the saying so as to bring out the seeming contradiction: 'He there had no power to do any work of power.' The same awful, and in some sense mysterious, power of limiting and restraining the influx of His love belongs to unbelief still, whether it take the shape of active rejection, or only of careless, passive non-reception. For faith makes us partakers of divine power by the very necessity of the case, and that power can attach itself to nothing else. So, 'if thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.'

Still further, we may observe that there is involved here the principle that our faith determines the amount of our power. That is true in reference to our own individual religious life, and it is true in reference to special capacities for Christ's service. Let me say a word or two about each of these. They run into each other, of course, for the truest power of service is found in the depth and purity of our own personal religion, and on the other hand our individual Christian character will never be deep or pure unless we are working for the Master. Still, for our present purpose, these two inseparable aspects of the one Christian life may be separated in thought.

As to the former, then, the measure of my trust in Christ is the measure of all the rest of my Christian character. / I shall have just as much purity, just as much peace, just as much wisdom or gentleness or love or courage or hope, as my faith is capable of taking up, and, so to speak, holding in solution. The 'point of saturation' in a man's soul, the quantity of God's grace which he is capable of absorbing, is accurately measured by his faith. / How much do I trust God? That will settle how much I can take in of God.

So much as we believe, so much can we contain. So much as we can contain, so much shall we receive. And in the very act of receiving the 'portion of our Father's goods that falleth' to us, we shall feel that there is a boundless additional portion ready to come as soon as we are ready for it, and thereby we shall be driven to larger desires and a wider opening of the lap of faith, which will ever be answered by 'good measure, pressed together and running over, measured into our bosoms.' But there will be no waste by the bestowment of what we cannot take. 'According to your faith, be it unto you.' That is the accurate thermometer which measures the temperature of our spiritual state. It is like the steam-gauge outside the boiler, which tells to a fraction the pressure of steam within, and so the power which can at the moment be exerted.

May I make a very simple, close personal application of this thought? We have as much religious life as we desire; that is, we have as much as our faith can take. There is the reason why such hosts of so-called Christians have such poor, feeble Christianity. *We* dare not say of any, 'They have a name to live, and are dead.' There is only one Eye who can tell when the heart has ceased to beat. But we may say that there are a mournful number of people who call themselves Christians, who look so like dead that no eye but Christ's can tell the difference. They are in a syncope that will be death soon, unless some mighty power rouse them.

And then, how many more of us there are, not so bad as that, but still feeble and languid, whose Christian history is a history of weakness, while God's power is open before us, of starving in the midst of

abundance, broken only by moments of firmer faith, and so of larger, happier possession, that make the poverty-stricken ordinary days appear ten times more poverty-stricken. The channel lies dry, a waste chaos of white stones and driftwood for long months, and only for an hour or two after the clouds have burst on the mountains does the stream fill it from bank to bank. Do not many of us remember moments of a far deeper and more earnest trust in Christ than marks our ordinary days? If such moments were continuous, should not we be the happy possessors of beauties of character and spiritual power, such as would put our present selves utterly to shame? And why are they not continuous? Why are our possessions in God so small, our power so weak? Dear friends! 'ye are not straitened in yourselves.' The only reason for defective spiritual progress and character is defective faith.

Then look at this same principle as it affects our faculties for Christian service. There, too, it is true that all things are possible to him that believeth. The saying had an application to the disciples who stood by, half-ashamed and half-surprised at their failure to cast out the demon, as well as to the father in his agony of desire and doubt. For them it meant that the measure of Christian service was mainly determined by the measure of their faith. It would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that in Christ's service a man can do pretty nearly what he believes he can do, if his confidence is built, not on himself, but on Christ.

If those nine Apostles, waiting there for their Master, had thought they could cast out the devil from the boy, do you not think that they could have done it? I do not mean to say that rash presumption, undertaking

in levity and self-confidence unsuitable kinds of work, will be honoured with success. But I do mean to say that, in the line of our manifest duty, the extent to which we can do Christ's work is very much the extent to which we believe, in dependence on Him, that we can do it. If we once make up our minds that we shall do a certain thing by Christ's help and for His sake, in ninety cases out of a hundred the expectation will fulfil itself, and we shall do it. 'Why could not we cast him out?' They need not have asked the question. 'Why could not you cast him out? Why, because you did not think you could, and with your timid attempt, making an experiment which you were not sure would succeed, provoked the failure which you feared.' The Church has never believed enough in its Christ-given power to cast out demons. We have never been confident enough that the victory was in our hands if we knew how to use our powers.

The same thing is true of each one of us. Audacity and presumption are humility and moderation, if only we feel that 'our sufficiency is of God.' 'I can do all things' is the language of simple soberness, if we go on to say 'through Christ which strengtheneth me.'

There is one more point, drawn from these words, viz., our faith can only take hold on the divine promises. Such language as this of my text and other kindred sayings of our Lord's has often been extended beyond its real force, and pressed into the service of a mistaken enthusiasm, for want of observing that very plain principle. The principle of our text has reference to outward things as well as to the spiritual life. But there are great exaggerations and misconceptions as to the province of faith in reference to these temporal things, and consequently there are misconceptions and

exaggerations on the part of many very good people as to the province of prayer in regard to them.

It seems to me that we shall be saved from these, if we distinctly recognise a very obvious principle, namely, that 'faith' can never go further than God's clear promises, and that whatever goes beyond God's word is not faith, but something else assuming its appearance.

For instance, suppose a father nowadays were to say: 'My child is sore vexed with sickness. I long for his recovery. I believe that Christ can heal him. I believe that He will. I pray in faith, and I know that I shall be answered.' Such a prayer goes beyond the record. Has Christ told you that it is His will that your child shall be healed? If not, how can you pray in faith that it is? You may pray in confidence that he will be healed, but such confident persuasion is not faith. Faith lays hold of Christ's distinct declaration of His will, but such confidence is only grasping a shadow, your own wishes. The father in this story was entitled to trust, because Christ told him that his trust was the condition of his son's being healed. So in response to the great word of our text, the man's faith leaped up and grasped our Lord's promise, with 'Lord, I believe.' But before Christ spoke, his desires, his wistful longing, his imploring cry for help, had no warrant to pass into faith, and did not so pass.

Christ's word must go before our faith, and must supply the object for our faith, and where Christ has not spoken, there is no room for the exercise of any faith, except the faith, 'It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth to Him good.' That is the true prayer of faith in regard to all matters of outward providence where we have no distinct word of God's which gives unmistakable indication of His will. The 'if' of the leper,

which has no place in the spiritual region, where we know that 'this is the will of God, even our sanctification,' has full force in the temporal region, where we do not know before the event what the will of the Lord is, 'If Thou wilt, Thou canst,' is there our best prayer.

Wherever a distinct and unmistakable promise of God's goes, it is safe for faith to follow; but to outrun His word is not faith, but self-will, and meets the deserved rebuke, 'Should it be according to thy mind?' There *are* unmistakable promises about outward things on which we may safely build. Let us confine our expectations within the limits of these, and turn them into the prayer of faith, so shooting back whence they came His winged words, 'This is the confidence that we have, that if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us.' Thus coming to Him, submitting all our wishes in regard to this world to His most loving will, and widening our confidence to the breadth of His great and loving purpose in regard to our own inward life, as well as in regard to our practical service, His answer will ever be, 'Great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.'



## UNBELIEVING BELIEF

‘And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.’—MARK ix. 24.

WE owe to Mark's Gospel the fullest account of the pathetic incident of the healing of the demoniac boy. He alone gives us this part of the conversation between our Lord and the afflicted child's father. The poor man had brought his child to the disciples, and found them unable to do anything with him. A torrent of appeal breaks from his lips as soon as the Lord gives him an opportunity of speaking. He dwells upon all the piteous details with that fondness for repetition which sorrow knows so well. Jesus gives him back his doubts. The father said, ‘If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us.’ Christ's answer, according to the true reading, is not as it stands in our Authorised Version, ‘If thou canst *believe*’—throwing, as it were, the responsibility on the man—but it is a quotation of the father's own word, ‘If Thou *canst*,’ as if He waved it aside with superb recognition of its utter unfitness to the present case. ‘Say not, If Thou canst. *That* is certain. All things are possible to thee’ (not to *do*, but to *get*) ‘*if*’—which is the only ‘if’ in the case—‘thou believest. I can, and if thy faith lays hold on My Omnipotence, all is done.’

That majestic word is like the blow of steel upon flint; it strikes a little spark of faith which lights up the soul and turns the smoky pillar of doubt into clear flame of confidence. ‘Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.’

I think in these wonderful words we have four

things—the birth, the infancy, the cry, and the education, of faith. And to these four I turn now.

I. First, then, note here the birth of faith.

There are many ways to the temple, and it matters little by which of them a man travels, if so be he gets there. There is no royal road to the Christian faith which saves the soul. And yet, though identity of experience is not to be expected, men are like each other in the depths, and only unlike on the surfaces, of their being. Therefore one man's experience carefully analysed is very apt to give, at least, the rudiments of the experience of all others who have been in similar circumstances. So I think we can see here, without insisting on any pedantic repetition of the same details in every case, in broad outline, a sketch-map of the road. There are three elements here: eager desire, the sense of utter helplessness, and the acceptance of Christ's calm assurances. Look at these three.

This man knew what he wanted, and he wanted it very sorely. Whosoever has any intensity and reality of desire for the great gifts which Jesus Christ comes to bestow, has taken at least one step on the way to faith. Conversely, the hindrances which block the path of a great many of us are simply that we do not care to possess the blessings which Jesus Christ in His Gospel offers. I am not talking now about the so-called intellectual hindrances to belief, though I think that a great many of these, if carefully examined, would be found, in the ultimate analysis, to repose upon this same stolid indifference to the blessings which Christianity offers. But what I wish to insist upon is that for large numbers of us, and no doubt for many men and women whom I address now, the real reason why they have not trust in Jesus Christ is

because they do not care to possess the blessings which Jesus Christ brings. Do you desire to have your sins forgiven? Has purity any attraction for you? Do you care at all about the calm and pure blessings of communion with God? Would you like to live always in the light of His face? Do you want to be the masters of your own lusts and passions? I do not ask you, Do you want to go to Heaven or to escape Hell, when you die? but I ask, Has that future in any of its aspects any such power over you as that it stirs you to any earnestness and persistency of desire, or is it all shadowy and vain, ineffectual and dim?

What we Christian teachers have to fight against is that we are charged to offer to men a blessing that they do not want, and have to create a demand before there can be any acceptance of the supply. 'Give us the leeks and garlies of Egypt,' said the Hebrews in the wilderness; 'our soul loatheth this light bread.' So it is with many of us; we do not want God, goodness, quietness of conscience, purity of life, self-consecration to a lofty ideal, one-thousandth part as much as we want success in our daily occupations, or some one or other of the delights that the world gives. I remember Luther, in his rough way, has a story—I think it is in his *Table-talk*—about a herd of swine to whom their keeper offered some rich dainties, and the pigs said, 'Give us grains.' That is what so many men do when Jesus Christ comes with His gifts and His blessings. They turn away, but if they were offered some poor earthly good, all their desires would go out towards it, and their eager hands would be scrambling who should first possess it.

Oh brethren, if we saw things as they are, and our needs as they are, nothing would kindle such intensity

of longing in our hearts as that rejected or neglected promise of life eternal and divine which Jesus Christ brings. If I could only once wake in some indifferent heart this longing, that heart would have taken at least the initial step to a life of Christian godliness.

Further, we have here the other element of a sense of utter helplessness. How often this poor father had looked at his boy in the grip of the fiend, and had wrung his hands in despair that he could not do anything for him! That same sense of absolute impotence is one which we all, if we rightly understand what we need, must cherish. Can you forgive your own sins? Can you cleanse your own nature? Can you make yourselves other than you are by any effort of volition, or by any painfulness of discipline? To a certain small extent you can. In regard to superficial culture and eradication, your careful husbandry of your own wills may do much, but you cannot deal with your deepest needs. If we understand what is required, in order to bring one soul into harmony and fellowship with God, we shall recognise that we ourselves can do nothing to save, and little to help ourselves. 'Every man his own redeemer,' which is the motto of some people nowadays, may do very well for fine weather and for superficial experience, but when the storm comes it proves a poor refuge, like the gay pavilions that they put up for festivals, which are all right whilst the sun is shining and the flags are fluttering, but are wretched shelters when the rain beats and the wind howls. We can do nothing for ourselves. The recognition of our own helplessness is the obverse, so to speak, and under-side, of confidence in the divine help. The coin, as it were, has its two faces. On the one is written, 'Trust in the Lord'; on the other is written, 'Nothing in

myself.' A drowning man, if he tries to help himself, only encumbers his would-be rescuer, and may drown him too. The truest help he can give is to let the strong arm that has cleft the waters for his sake fling itself around him and bear him safe to land. So, eager desire after offered blessings and consciousness of my own impotence to secure them—these are the initial steps of faith.

And the last of the elements here is, listening to the calm assurance of Jesus Christ: 'If Thou canst! Do not say that to Me; I can, and because I can, all things are possible for thee to receive.' In like manner He stands at the door of each of our hearts and speaks to each of our needs, and says: 'I can satisfy it. Rest for thy soul, cleansing for thy sins, satisfaction for thy desires, guidance for thy pilgrimage, power for thy duties, patience in thy sufferings—all these will come to thee, if thou layest hold of My hand.' His assurance helps trembling confidence to be born, and out of doubt the great calm word of the Master smites the fire of trust. And we, dear brethren, if we will listen to Him, shall surely find in Him all that we need. Think how marvellous it is that this Jewish peasant should plant Himself in the front of humanity, over against the burdened, sinful race of men, and pledge Himself to forgive and to cleanse their sins, to bear all their sicknesses, to be their strength in weakness, their comfort in sorrow, the rest of their hearts, their heaven upon earth, their life in death, their glory in heaven, and their all in all; and not only should pledge Himself, but in the blessed experience of millions should have more than fulfilled all that He promised. 'They trusted in Him, and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed.' Will you not

answer His sovereign word of promise with your 'Lord, I believe'?

II. Then, secondly, we have here the infancy of faith.

As soon as the consciousness of belief dawned upon the father, and the effort to exercise it was put forth, there sprang up the consciousness of its imperfection. He would never have known that he did not believe unless he had tried to believe. So it is in regard to all excellences and graces of character. The desire of possessing some feeble degree of any virtue or excellence, and the effort to put it forth, is the surest way of discovering how little of it we have. On the other side, sorrow for the lack of some form of goodness is itself a proof of the partial possession, in some rudimentary and incipient form, of that goodness. The utterly lazy man never mourns over his idleness; it is only the one that would fain work harder than he does, and already works tolerably hard, who does so. So the little spark of faith in this man's heart, like a taper in a cavern, showed the abysses of darkness that lay unilluminated round about it.

Thus, then, in its infancy, faith may and does co-exist with much unfaith and doubt. The same state of mind, looked at from its two opposite ends, as it were, may be designated faith or unbelief; just as a piece of shot silk, according to the angle at which you hold it, may show you only the bright colours of its warp or the dark ones of its weft. When you are travelling in a railway train with the sun streaming in at the windows, if you look out on the one hand you will see the illumined face of every tree and blade of grass and house; and if you look out on the other, you will see

their shadowed side. And so the same landscape may seem to be all lit up by the sunshine of belief, or to be darkened by the gloom of distrust. If we consider how great and how perfect ought to be our confidence, to bear any due proportion to the firmness of that upon which it is built, we shall not be slow to believe that through life there will always be the presence in us, more or less, of these two elements. There will be all degrees of progress between the two extremes of infantile and mature faith.

There follows from that thought this practical lesson, that the discovery of much unbelief should never make a man doubt the reality or genuineness of his little faith. We are all apt to write needlessly bitter things against ourselves when we get a glimpse of the incompleteness of our Christian life and character. But there is no reason why a man should fancy that he is a hypocrite because he finds out that he is not a perfect believer. But, on the other hand, let us remember that the main thing is not the maturity, but the progressive character, of faith. It was most natural that this man in our text, at the very first moment when he began to put his confidence in Jesus Christ as able to heal his child, should be aware of much tremulousness mingling with it. But is it not most unnatural that there should be the same relative proportion of faith and unbelief in the heart and experience of men who have long professed to be Christians? You do not expect the infant to have adult limbs, but you do expect it to grow. True, faith at its beginning may be like a grain of mustard seed, but if the grain of mustard seed be alive it will grow to a great tree, where all the fowls of the air can lodge in the branches. Oh! it is a crying shame and

sin that in all Christian communities there should be so many grey-headed babies, men who have for years and years been professing to be Christ's followers, and whose faith is but little, if at all, stronger—nay ! perhaps is even obviously weaker—than it was in the first days of their profession. 'Ye have need of milk, and not of strong meat,' very many of you. And the vitality of your faith is made suspicious, not because it is feeble, but because it is not growing stronger.

### III. Notice the cry of infant faith.

'Help Thou mine unbelief' may have either of two meanings. The man's desire was either that his faith should be increased and his unbelief 'helped' by being removed by Christ's operation upon his spirit, or that Christ would 'help' him and his boy by healing the child, though the faith which asked the blessing was so feeble that it might be called unbelief. There is nothing in the language or in the context to determine which of these two meanings is intended; we must settle it by our own sense of what would be most likely under the circumstances. To me it seems extremely improbable that, when the father's whole soul was absorbed in the healing of his son, he should turn aside to ask for the inward and spiritual process of having his faith strengthened. Rather he said, 'Heal my child, though it is unbelief as much as faith that asks Thee to do it.'

The lesson is that, even when we are conscious of much tremulousness in our faith, we have a right to ask and expect that it shall be answered. Weak faith is faith. The tremulous hand *does* touch. The cord may be slender as a spider's web that binds a heart to Jesus, but it *does* bind. The poor woman in the other miracle who put out her wasted finger-tip, coming behind Him



in the crowd, and stealthily touching the hem of His garment, though it was only the end of her finger-nail that was laid on the robe, carried away with her the blessing. And so the feeblest faith joins the soul, in the measure of its strength, to Jesus Christ.

But let us remember that, whilst thus the cry of infant faith is heard, the stronger voice of stronger faith is more abundantly heard. Jesus Christ once for all laid down the law when He said to one of the suppliants at His feet, 'According to your faith be it unto you.' The measure of our belief is the measure of our blessing. The wider you open the door, the more angels will crowd into it, with their white wings and their calm faces. The bore of the pipe determines the amount of water that flows into the cistern. Every man gets, in the measure in which he desires. Though a tremulous hand may hold out a cup into which Jesus Christ will not refuse to pour the wine of the kingdom, yet the tremulous hand will spill much of the blessing; and he that would have the full enjoyment of the mercies promised, and possible, must 'ask in faith, nothing wavering.' The sensitive paper which records the hours of sunshine in a day has great gaps upon its line of light answering to the times when clouds have obscured the sun; and the communication of blessings from God is intermittent, if there be intermittency of faith. If you desire an unbroken line of mercy, joy, and peace, keep up an unbroken continuity of trustful confidence.

IV. Lastly, we have here the education of faith.

Christ paid no heed in words to the man's confession of unbelief, but proceeded to do the work which answered his prayer in both its possible meanings. He responded to imperfect confidence by His perfect

work of cure, and, by that perfect work of cure, He strengthened the imperfect confidence which it had answered.

Thus He educates us by His answers—His over-answers—to our poor desires; and the abundance of His gifts rebukes the poverty of our petitions more emphatically than any words of remonstrance beforehand could have done. He does not lecture us into faith, but He blesses us into it. When the Apostle was sinking in the flood, Jesus Christ said no word of reproach until He had grasped him with His strong hand and held him safe. And then, when the sustaining touch thrilled through all the frame, then, and not till then, He said—as we may fancy, with a smile on His face that the moonlight showed—as knowing how unanswerable His question was, ‘O thou of little faith, *wherefore* didst thou doubt?’ That is how He will deal with us if we will; over-answering our tremulous petitions, and so teaching us to hope more abundantly that ‘we shall praise Him more and more.’

The disappointments, the weaknesses, the shameful defeats which come when our confidence fails, are another page of His lesson-book. The same Apostle of whom I have been speaking got that lesson when, standing on the billows, and, instead of looking at Christ, looking at their wrath and foam, his heart failed him, and because his heart failed him he began to sink. If we turn away from Jesus Christ, and interrupt the continuity of our faith by calculating the height of the breakers and the weight of the water that is in them, and what will become of us when they topple over with their white crests upon our heads, then gravity will begin to work, and we shall begin to sink. And well for us if, when we have sunk as far as

our knees, we look back again to the Master and say, 'Lord, save me; I perish!' The weakness which is our own when faith sleeps, and the rejoicing power which is ours because it is His, when faith wakes, are God's education of it to fuller and ampler degrees and depth. We shall lose the meaning of life, and the best lesson that joy and sorrow, calm and storm, victory and defeat, can give us, unless all these make us 'rooted and grounded in faith.'

Dear friend, do you desire your truest good? Do you know that you cannot win it, or fight for it to gain it, or do anything to obtain it, in your own strength? Have you heard Jesus Christ saying to you, 'Come . . . and I will give you rest'? Oh! I beseech you, do not turn away from Him, but like this agonised father in our story, fall at His feet with 'Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief,' and He will confirm your feeble faith by His rich response.

## RECEIVING AND FORBIDDING

'And He came to Capernaum : and being in the house He asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? 34. But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest, 35. And He sat down, and called the Twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. 36. And He took a child, and set him in the midst of them : and when He had taken him in His arms, He said unto them, 37. Whosoever shall receive one of such children in My name, receiveth Me : and whosoever shall receive Me, receiveth not Me, but Him that sent Me. 38. And John answered Him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and he followeth not us : and we forbid him, because he followeth not us. 39. But Jesus said, Forbid him not : for there is no man which shall do a miracle in My name, that can lightly speak evil of Me. 40. For he that is not against us is on our part. 41. For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in My name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward. 42. And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in Me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.'—MARK ix. 33-42.

SURELY the disciples might have found something better to talk about on the road from Cæsarea, where they had heard from Jesus of His sufferings, than this miserable wrangle about rank ! Singularly enough, each announcement of the Cross seems to have provoked something of the sort. Probably they understood little of His meaning, but hazily thought that the crisis was at hand when He should establish the kingdom ; and so their ambition, rather than their affection, was stirred. Perhaps, too, the dignity bestowed on Peter after his confession, and the favour shown to the three witnesses of the Transfiguration, may have created jealousy. Matthew makes the quarrel to have been about future precedence ; Mark about present. The one was striven for with a view to the other. How chill it must have struck on Christ's heart, that those who loved Him best cared so much more for their own petty superiority than for His sorrows !

I. Note the law of service as the true greatness

(verses 33-35). 'When He was in the house, He asked them.' He had let them talk as they would on the road, walking alone in front, and they keeping, as they thought, out of ear-shot; but, when at rest together in the house (perhaps Peter's) where He lived in Capernaum, He lets them see, by the question and still more by the following teaching, that He knew what He asked, and needed no answer. The tongues that had been so loud on the road were dumb in the house—silenced by conscience. His servants still do, and say many things on the road which they would not do if they saw Him close beside them, and they sometimes fancy that these escape Him. But when they are 'in the house' with Him, they will find that He knew all that was going on; and when He asks the account of it, they, too, will be speechless. 'A thing which does not appear wrong by itself shows its true character when brought to the judgment of God and the knowledge of Jesus Christ' (*Bengel*).

Christ deals with the fault with much solemnity, seating Himself, as Teacher and Superior, and summoning the whole Twelve to hear. We do not enter on the difficult question of the relation of Mark's report of our Lord's words to those of the other Evangelists, but rather try to bring out the significance of their form and connection here. Note, then, that here we have not so much the nature of true greatness, as the road to it. 'If any man would be first,' he is to be least and servant, and thereby he will reach his aim. Of course, that involves the conception of the nature of true greatness as service, but still the distinction is to be kept in view. Further, 'last of all' is not the same as 'servant of all.' The one phrase expresses humility; the other, ministry. An indolent humility, so very humble

that it does nothing for others, and a service which is not humble, are equally incomplete, and neither leads to or is the greatness at which alone a Christian ought to aim. There are two paradoxes here. The lowest is the highest, the servant is the chief; and they may be turned round with equal truth—the highest is the lowest, and the chief is the servant. The former tells us how things really are, and what they look like, when seen from the centre by His eye. The latter prescribes the duties and responsibilities of high position. In fact and truth, to sink is the way to rise, and to serve is the way to rule—only the rise and the rule are of another sort than contents worldly ambition, and the Christian must rectify his notions of what loftiness and greatness are. On the other hand, distinguishing gifts of mind, heart, leisure, position, possessions, or anything else, are given us for others, and bind us to serve. Both things follow from the nature of Christ's kingdom, which is a kingdom of love; for in love the vulgar distinctions of higher and lower are abolished, and service is delight. This is no mere pretty sentiment, but a law which grips hard and cuts deep. Christ's servants have not learned it yet, and the world heeds it not; but, till it governs all human society, and pulls up ambition, domination, and pride of place by the roots, society will groan under ills which increase with the increase of wealth and culture in the hands of a selfish few.

II. Note the exhibition of the law in a life. Children are quick at finding out who loves them, and there would always be some hovering near for a smile from Christ. With what eyes of innocent wonder the child would look up at Him, as He gently set him there, in the open space in front of Himself! Mark does not

record any accompanying words, and none were needed, The unconsciousness of rank, the spontaneous acceptance of inferiority, the absence of claims to consideration and respect, which naturally belong to childhood as it ought to be, and give it winningness and grace, are the marks of a true disciple, and are the more winning in such because they are not of nature, but regained by self-abnegation. What the child is we have to become. This child was the example of one-half of the law, being 'least of all,' and perfectly contented to be so; but the other half was not shown in him, for his little hands could do but small service. Was there, then, no example in this scene of that other requirement? Surely there was; for the child was not left standing, shy, in the midst, but, before embarrassment became weeping, was caught up in Christ's arms, and folded to His heart. He had been taken as the instance of humility, and he then became the subject of tender ministry. Christ and he divided the illustration of the whole law between them, and the very inmost nature of true service was shown in our Lord's loving clasp and soothing pressure to His heart. It is as if He had said, 'Look! this is how you must serve; for you cannot help the weak unless you open your arms and hearts to them.' Jesus, with the child held to His bosom, is the living law of service, and the child nestling close to Him, because sure of His love, is the type of the trustful affection which we must evoke if we are to serve or help. This picture has gone straight to the hearts of men; and who can count the streams of tenderness and practical kindliness of which it has been the source?

Christ goes on to speak of the child, not as the example of service, but of being served. The deep

words carry us into blessed mysteries which will recompense the lowly servants, and lift them high in the kingdom. Observe the precision of the language, both as regards the persons received and the motive of reception. 'One of such little children' means those who are thus lowly, unambitious, and unexact. 'In My name' defines the motive as not being simple humanity or benevolence, but the distinct recognition of Christ's command and loving obedience to His revealed character. No doubt, natural benevolence has its blessings for those who exercise it; but that which is here spoken of is something much deeper than nature, and wins a far higher reward.

That reward is held forth in unfathomable words, of which we can but skim the surface. They mean more than that such little ones are so closely identified with Him that, in His love, He reckons good done to them as done to Him. That is most blessedly true. Nor is it true only because He lovingly reckons the deed as done to Him, though it really is not; but, by reason of the derived life which all His children possess from Him, they are really parts of Himself; and in that most real though mystic unity, what is done to them is, in fact, done to Him. Further, if the service be done in His name, then, on whomsoever it may be done, it is done to Him. This great saying unveils the true sacredness and real recipient of all Christian service. But more than that is in the words. When we 'receive' Christ's little ones by help and loving ministry, we receive Him, and in Him God, for joy and strength. Unselfish deeds in His name open the heart for more of Christ and God, and bring on the doer the blessing of fuller insight, closer communion, more complete assimilation to his Lord. Therefore such



service is the road to the true superiority in His kingdom, which depends altogether on the measure of His own nature which has flowed into our emptiness.

III. The Apostles' conscience-stricken confession of their breach of the law (verses 38-40). Peter is not spokesman this time, but John, whose conscience was more quickly pricked. At first sight, the connection of his interruption with the theme of the discourse seems to be merely the recurrence of the phrase, 'in Thy name'; but, besides that, there is an obvious contrast between 'receiving' and 'forbidding.' The Apostle is uneasy when he remembers what they had done, and, like an honest man, he states the case to Christ, half-confessing, and half-asking for a decision. He begins to think that perhaps the man whom they had silenced was 'one such little child,' and had deserved more sympathetic treatment. How he came to be so true a disciple as to share in the power of casting out devils, and yet not to belong to the closer followers of Jesus, we do not know, and need not guess. So it was; and John feels, as he tells the story, that perhaps their motives had not been so much their Master's honour as their own. 'He followeth not us,' and yet he is trenching on our prerogatives. The greater fact that he and they followed Christ was overshadowed by the lesser that he did not follow them. There spoke the fiery spirit which craved the commission to burn up a whole village, because of its inhospitality. There spoke the spirit of ecclesiastical intolerance, which in all ages has masqueraded as zeal for Christ, and taken 'following us' and 'following Him' to be the same thing. But there spoke, too, a glimmering consciousness that gagging men was not precisely 'receiving' them, and that if 'in Thy name' so sanctified deeds, perhaps the

unattached exorcist, who could cast out demons by it, was 'a little one' to be taken to their hearts, and not an enemy to be silenced. Pity that so many listen to the law, and do not, like John, feel it prick them!

Christ forbids such 'forbidding,' and thereby sanctions 'irregularities' and 'unattached' work, which have always been the bugbears of sticklers for ecclesiastical uniformity, and have not seldom been the life of Christianity. That authoritative, unconditional 'forbid him not' ought, long ago, to have rung the funeral knell of intolerance, and to have ended the temptation to idolise 'conformity,' and to confound union to organised forms of the Christian community with union to Christ. But bigotry dies hard. The reasons appended serve to explain the position of the man in question. If he had wrought miracles in Christ's name, he must have had some faith in it; and his experience of its power would deepen that. So there was no danger of his contradicting himself by speaking against Jesus. The power of 'faith in the Name' to hallow deeds, the certainty that rudimentary faith will, when exercised, increase, the guarantee of experience as sure to lead to blessing from Jesus, are all involved in this saying. But its special importance is as a reason for the disciples' action. Because the man's action gives guarantees for his future, they are not to silence him. That implies that they are only to forbid those who do speak evil of Christ; and that to all others, even if they have not reached the full perception of truth, they are to extend patient forbearance and guidance. 'The mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped'; but the mouth that begins to stammer His name is to be taught and cherished.

Christ's second reason still more plainly claims the

man for an ally. Commentators have given themselves a great deal of trouble to reconcile this saying with the other—‘He that is not with Me is against Me.’ If by reconciling is meant twisting both to mean the same thing, it cannot be done. If preventing the appearance of contradiction is meant, it does not seem necessary. The two sayings do not contradict, but they complete, each other. They apply to different classes of persons, and common-sense has to determine their application. This man did, in some sense, believe in Jesus, and worked deeds that proved the power of the Name. Plainly, such work was in the same direction as the Lord’s and the disciples’. Such a case is one for the application of tolerance. But the principle must be limited by the other, else it degenerates into lazy indifference. ‘He that is not against us is for us,’ if it stood alone, would dissolve the Church, and destroy distinctions in belief and practice which it would be fatal to lose. ‘He that is not with Me is against Me,’ if it stood alone, would narrow sympathies, and cramp the free development of life. We need both to understand and get the good of either.

IV. We have the reward of receiving Christ’s little ones set over against the retribution that seizes those who cause them to stumble (verses 41, 42). These verses seem to resume the broken thread of verse 37, whilst they also link on to the great principle laid down in verse 40. He that is ‘not against’ is ‘for,’ even if he only gives a ‘cup of water’ to Christ’s disciple because he is Christ’s. That shows that there is some regard for Jesus in him. It is a germ which may grow. Such an one shall certainly have his reward. That does not mean that he will receive it in a future life, but that here his deed shall bring after it blessed consequences

to himself. Of these, none will be more blessed than the growing regard for the Name, which already is, in some degree, precious to him. The faintest perception of Christ's beauty, honestly lived out, will be increased. Every act strengthens its motive. The reward of living our convictions is firmer and more enlightened conviction. Note, too, that the person spoken of belongs to the same class as the silenced exorcist, and that this reads the disciples a further lesson. Jesus will look with love on the acts which even a John wished to forbid. Note, also, that the disciples here are the recipients of the kindness. They are no longer being taught to receive the 'little ones,' but are taught that they themselves belong to that class, and need kindly succour from these outsiders, whom they had proudly thought to silence.

The awful, reticent words, which shadow forth and yet hide the fate of those who cause the feeblest disciple to stumble, are not for us to dilate upon. Jesus saw the realities of future retribution, and deliberately declares that death is a less evil than such an act. The 'little ones' are sacred because they are His. The same relation to Him which made kindness to them so worthy of reward, makes harm to them so worthy of punishment. Under the one lies an incipient love to Him; under the other, a covert and perhaps scarcely conscious opposition. It is devil's work to seduce simple souls from allegiance to Christ. There are busy hands to-day laying stumbling-blocks in the way, especially of young Christians—stumbling-blocks of doubt, of frivolity, of slackened morality, and the like. It were better, says One who saw clearly into that awful realm beyond, if a heavy millstone were knotted about their necks,

and they were flung into the deepest place of the lake that lay before Him as he spoke. He does not speak exaggerated words; and if a solemn strain of vehemence, unlike His ordinary calm, is audible here, it is because what He knew, and did not tell, gave solemn earnestness to His veiled and awe-inspiring prophecy of doom. What imagination shall fill out the details of the 'worse than' which lurks behind that 'better'?

## AN UNANSWERED QUESTION

**‘What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way!’—MARK ix. 33.**

**WAS** it not a strange time to squabble when they had just been told of His death? Note—

I. The variations of feeling common to the disciples and to us all: one moment ‘exceeding sorrowful,’ the next fighting for precedence.

II. Christ’s divine insight into His servants’ faults. This question was put because He knew what the wrangle had been about. The disputants did not answer, but He knew without an answer, as His immediately following warnings show. How blessed to think that Psalm cxxxix. applies to Him—‘There is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord! Thou knowest it altogether.’

III. The compassion of Christ seeking to cure the sins He sees. His question is not to rebuke, but to heal; so His perfect knowledge is blended with perfect love.

IV. The test of evil. They were ashamed to tell Him the cause of their dispute.

V. The method of cure. The presence of Christ is the end of strife and of sin in general.

## SALTED WITH FIRE

**'Every one shall be salted with fire.'—MARK ix. 49.**

OUR Lord has just been uttering some of the most solemn words that ever came from His gracious lips. He has been enjoining the severest self-suppression, extending even to mutilation and excision of the eye, the hand, or the foot, that might cause us to stumble. He has been giving that sharp lesson on the ground of plain common sense and enlightened self-regard. *It is better, obviously, to live maimed than to die whole.* The man who elects to keep a mortified limb, and thereby to lose life, is a suicide and a fool. It is a solemn thought that a similar mad choice is possible in the moral and spiritual region.

To these stern injunctions, accompanied by the awful sanctions of that consideration, our Lord appends the words of my text. They are obscure and have often been misunderstood. This is not the place to enter on a discussion of the various explanations that have been proposed of them. A word or two is all that is needful to put us in possession of the point of view from which I wish to lay them on your hearts at this time.

I take the 'every one' of my text to mean not mankind generally, but every individual of the class whom our Lord is addressing—that is to say, His disciples. He is laying down the law for all Christians. I take the paradox which brings together 'salting' and 'fire,' to refer, not to salt as a means of communicating savour to food, but as a means of preserving from putrefaction. And I take the 'fire' here to refer, not to the same process which is hinted at in the awful

preceding words, 'the fire is not quenched,' but to be set in opposition to that fire, and to mean something entirely different. There is a fire that destroys, and there is a fire that preserves; and the alternative for every man is to choose between the destructive and the conserving influences. Christian disciples have to submit to be 'salted with fire,' lest a worse thing befall them.

I. And so the first point that I would ask you to notice here is—that fiery cleansing to which every Christian must yield.

Now I have already referred to the relation between the words of my text and those immediately preceding, as being in some sense one of opposition and contrast. I think we are put on the right track for understanding the solemn words of this text if we remember the great saying of John the Baptist, where, in precisely similar fashion, there are set side by side the two conceptions of the chaff being cast into the unquenchable fire (the same expression as in our text), and 'He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.'

The salting fire, then, which cleanses and preserves, and to which every Christian soul must submit itself, to be purged thereby, is, as I take it, primarily and fundamentally the fire of that Divine Spirit which Christ Himself told us that He had come to cast upon the earth, and yearned, in a passion of desire, to see kindled. The very frequent use of the emblem in this same signification throughout Scripture, I suppose I need not recall to you. It seems to me that the only worthy interpretation of the words before us, which goes down into their depths and harmonises with the whole of the rest of the teaching of Scripture, is that which recognises these words of my text as no un-



welcome threat, as no bitter necessity, but as a joyful promise bringing to men, laden and burdened with their sins, the good news that it is possible for them to be purged from them entirely by the fiery ministration of that Divine Spirit. Just as we take a piece of foul clay and put it into the furnace, and can see, as it gets red-hot, the stains melt away, as a cloud does in the blue, from its surface, so if we will plunge ourselves into the influences of that divine power which Christ has come to communicate to the world, our sin and all our impurities will melt from off us, and we shall be clean. No amount of scrubbing with soap and water will do it. The stain is a great deal too deep for that, and a mightier solvent than any that we can apply, if unaided and unsupplied from above, is needed to make us clean. 'Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean,' especially when the would-be bringer is himself the unclean thing? Surely not one. Unless there be a power *ab extra*, unparticipant of man's evils, and yet capable of mingling with the evil man's inmost nature, and dealing with it, then I believe that universal experience and our individual experience tell us that there is no hope that we shall ever get rid of our transgressions.

Brethren, for a man by his own unaided effort, however powerful, continuous, and wisely directed it may be, to cleanse himself utterly from his iniquity, is as hopeless as it would be for him to sit down with a hammer and a chisel and try by mechanical means to get all the iron out of a piece of ironstone. The union is chemical, not mechanical. And so hammers and chisels will only get a very little of the metal out. The one solvent is fire. Put the obstinate crude ore into your furnace, and get the temperature up, and the

molten metal will run clear. There should be mountains of scorix, the dross and relics of our abandoned sins, around us all.

If we desire to be delivered, let us go into the fire. It will burn up all our evil, and it will burn up nothing else. Keep close to Christ. Lay your hearts open to the hallowing influences of the motives and the examples that lie in the story of His life and death. Seek for the fiery touch of that transforming Spirit, and be sure that you quench Him not, nor grieve Him. And then your weakness will be reinvigorated by celestial powers, and the live coal upon your lips will burn up all your iniquity.

But, subordinately to this deepest meaning, as I take it, of the great symbol of our text, let me remind you of another possible application of it, which follows from the preceding. God's Spirit cleanses men mainly by raising their spirits to a higher temperature. For coldness is akin to sin, and heavenly warmth is akin to righteousness. Enthusiasm always ennobles, delivers men, even on the lower reaches of life and conduct from many a meanness and many a sin. And when it becomes a warmth of spirit kindled by the reception of the fire of God, then it becomes the solvent which breaks the connection between me and my evil. It is the cold Christian who makes no progress in conquering his sin. The one who is filled with the love of God, and has the ardent convictions and the burning enthusiasm which that love ought to produce in our hearts, is the man who will conquer and eject his evils.

Nor must we forget that there is still another possible application of the words. For whilst, on the one hand, the Divine Spirit's method of delivering us is

very largely that of imparting to us the warmth of ardent, devout emotion; on the other hand, a part of this method is the passing of us through the fiery trials and outward disciplines of life. 'Every one shall be salted with fire' in that sense. And we have learned, dear brethren, but little of the lovingkindness of the Lord if we are not able to say, 'I have grown more in likeness to Jesus Christ by rightly accepted sorrows than by anything besides.' Be not afraid of calamities; be not stumbled by disaster. Take the fiery trial which is sent to you as being intended to bring about, at the last, the discovery 'unto praise and honour and glory' of your faith, that is 'much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire.' 'Every one shall be salted with fire,' the Christian law of life is, Submit to the fiery cleansing. Alas! alas! for the many thousands of professing Christians who are wrapping themselves in such thick folds of non-conducting material that that fiery energy can only play on the surface of their lives, instead of searching them to the depths. Do you see to it, dear brethren, that you lay open your whole natures, down to the very inmost roots, to the penetrating, searching, cleansing power of that Spirit. And let us all go and say to Him, 'Search me, O God! and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me.'

## II. Notice the painfulness of this fiery cleansing.

The same ideas substantially are conveyed in my text as are expressed, in different imagery, by the solemn words that precede it. The 'salting with fire' comes substantially to the same thing as the amputation of the hand and foot, and the plucking out of the eye, that cause to stumble. The metaphor expresses a painful process. It is no pleasant thing to submit the

bleeding stump to the actual cautery, and to press it, all sensitive, upon the hot plate that will stop the flow of blood. But such pain of shrinking nerves is to be borne, and to be courted, if we are wise, rather than to carry the hand or the eye that led astray unmutilated into total destruction. Surely that is common sense.

The process is painful because we are weak. The highest ideal of Christian progress would be realised if one of the metaphors with which our Lord expresses it were adequate to cover the whole ground, and we grew as the wheat grows, 'first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.' But the tranquillity of vegetable growth, and the peaceful progress which it symbolises, are not all that you and I have to expect. Emblems of a very different kind have to be associated with that of the quiet serenity of the growing corn, in order to describe all that a Christian man has to experience in the work of becoming like his Master. It is a fight as well as a growth; it is a building requiring our continuity of effort, as well as a growth. There is something to be got rid of as well as much to be appropriated. We do not only need to become better, we need to become less bad. Squatters have camped on the land, and cling to it and hold it *vi et armis*; and these have to be ejected before peaceful settlement is possible.

One might go on multiplying metaphors *ad libitum*, in order to bring out the one thought that it needs huge courage to bear being sanctified, or, if you do not like the theological word, to bear being made better. It is no holiday task, and unless we are willing to have a great deal that is against the grain done to us, and in us, and by us, we shall never achieve it. We have

to accept the pain. Desires have to be thwarted, and that is not pleasant. Self has to be suppressed, and that is not delightful. A growing conviction of the depth of one's own evil has to be cherished, and that is not a grateful thought for any of us. Pains external, which are felt by reason of disciplinary sorrows, are not worthy to be named in the same day as those more recondite and inward agonies. But, brother, they are all 'light' as compared with the exceeding weight of 'glory,' coming from conformity to the example of our Master, which they prepare for us.

And so I bring you Christ's message: He will have no man to enlist in His army under false pretences. He will not deceive any of us by telling us that it is all easy work and plain sailing. Salting by fire can never be other than to the worse self an agony, just because it is to the better self a rapture. And so let us make up our minds that no man is taken to heaven in his sleep, and that the road is a rough one, judging from the point of view of flesh and sense; but though rough, narrow, often studded with sharp edges, like the plough coulter that they used to lay in the path in the old rude ordeals, it still leads straight to the goal, and bleeding feet are little to pay for a seat at Christ's right hand.

III. Lastly, notice the preservative result of this painful cleansing.

Our Lord brings together, in our text, as is often His wont, two apparently contradictory ideas, in order, by the paradox, to fix our attention the more vividly upon His words. Fire destroys; salt preserves. They are opposites. But yet the opposites may be united in one mighty reality, a fire which preserves and does not destroy. The deepest truth is that the cleansing fire

which the Christ will give us preserves us, because it destroys that which is destroying us. If you kill the germs of putrefaction in a bit of dead flesh, you preserve the flesh; and if you bring to bear upon a man the power which will kill the thing that is killing him, its destructive influence is the condition of its conserving one.

And so it is, in regard to that great spiritual influence which Jesus Christ is ready to give to every one of us. It slays that which is slaying us, for our sins destroy in us the true life of a man, and make us but parables of walking death. When the three Hebrews were cast into the fiery furnace in Babylon, the flames burned nothing but their bonds, and they walked at liberty in the fire. And so it will be with us. We shall be preserved by that which slays the sins that would otherwise slay us.

Let me lay on your hearts before I close the solemn alternative to which I have already referred, and which is suggested by the connection of my text with the preceding words. There is a fire that destroys and is not quenched. Christ's previous words are much too metaphorical for us to build dogmatic definitions upon. But Jesus Christ did not exaggerate. If here and now sin has so destructive an effect upon a man, O, who will venture to say that he knows the limits of its murderous power in that future life, when retribution shall begin with new energy and under new conditions? Brethren, whilst I dare not enlarge, I still less dare to suppress; and I ask you to remember that not I, or any man, but Jesus Christ Himself, has put before each of us this alternative—either the fire unquenchable, which destroys a man, or the merciful fire, which slays his sins and saves him alive.

Social reformers, philanthropists, you that have tried and failed to overcome your evil, and who feel the loathly thing so intertwined with your being that to pluck it from your heart is to tear away the very heart's walls themselves, here is a hope for you. Closely as our evil is twisted in with the fibres of our character, there is a hand that can untwine the coils, and cast away the sin, and preserve the soul. And although we sometimes feel as if our sinfulness and our sin were so incorporated with ourselves that it made oneself, with a man's head and a serpent's tail, let us take the joyful assurance that if we trust ourselves to Christ, and open our hearts to His power, we can shake off the venomous beast into the fire and live a fuller life, because the fire has consumed that which would otherwise have consumed us.

## ‘SALT IN YOURSELVES’

‘Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.’—MARK ix. 50.

IN the context ‘salt’ is employed to express the preserving, purifying, divine energy which is otherwise spoken of as ‘fire.’ The two emblems produce the same result. They both salt—that is, they cleanse and keep. And if in the one we recognise the quick energy of the Divine Spirit as the central idea, no less are we to see the same typified under a slightly different aspect in the other. The fire transforms into its own substance and burns away all the grosser particles. The salt arrests corruption, keeps off destruction, and diffuses its sanative influence through all the particles of the substance with which it comes in contact. And in both metaphors it is the operation of God’s cleansing Spirit, in its most general form, that is set forth, including all the manifold ways by which God deals with us to purge us from our iniquity, to free us from the death which treads close on the heels of wrongdoing, the decomposition and dissolution which surely follow on corruption.

This the disciples are exhorted to have in themselves that they may be at peace one with another. Perhaps we shall best discover the whole force of this saying by dealing—

I. With the symbol itself and the ideas derived from it.

The salt cleanses, arrests corruption which impends over the dead masses, sweetens and purifies, and so preserves from decay and dissolution. It works by



contact, and within the mass. It thus stands as an emblem of the cleansing which God brings, both in respect (a) to that on which it operates, (b) to the purpose of its application, and (c) to the manner in which it produces its effects.

(a) That on which it operates.

There is implied here a view of human nature, not flattering but true. It is compared with a dead thing, in which the causes that bring about corruption are already at work, with the sure issue of destruction. This in its individual application comes to the assertion of sinful tendency and actual sin as having its seat and root in all our souls, so that the present condition is corruption, and the future issue is destruction. The consequent ideas are that any power which is to cleanse must come from without, not from within; that purity is not to be won by our own efforts, and that there is no disposition in human nature to make these efforts. There is no recuperative power in human nature. True, there may be outward reformation of habits, etc., but, if we grasp the thought that the tap-root of sin is selfishness, this impotence becomes clearer, and it is seen that sin affects all our being, and that therefore the healing must come from beyond us.

(b) The purpose—namely, cleansing.

In salt we may include the whole divine energy; the Word, the Christ, the Spirit. So the intention of the Gospel is mainly to make clean. Preservation is a consequence of that.

(c) The manner of its application.

Inward, penetrating, by contact; but mainly the great peculiarity of Christian ethics is that the inner life is dealt with first, the will and the heart, and afterwards the outward conduct.

II. The part which we have to take in this cleansing process.

‘Have salt’ is a command; and this implies that while all the cleansing energy comes from God, the working of it on our souls depends on ourselves.

(a) Its original reception depends on our faith.

The ‘salt’ is here, but our contact with it is established by our acceptance of it. There is no magical cleansing; but it must be received within if we would share in its operation.

(b) Its continuous energy is not secured without our effort.

Let us just recall the principle already referred to, that the ‘salt’ implies the whole cleansing divine energies, and ask what are these? The Bible variously speaks of men as being cleansed by the ‘blood of Christ,’ by the ‘truth,’ by the ‘Spirit.’ Now, it is not difficult to bring all these into one focus, viz., that the Spirit of God cleanses us by bringing the truth concerning Christ to bear on our understandings and hearts.

We are sanctified in proportion as we are coming under the influence of Christian truth, which, believed by our understandings and our hearts, supplies motives to our wills which lead us to holiness by copying the example of Christ.

Hence the main principle is that the cleansing energy operates on us in proportion as we are influenced by the truths of the Gospel.

Again, it works in proportion as we seek for, and submit to, the guidance of God’s Holy Spirit.

In proportion as we are living in communion with Christ.

In proportion as we seek to deny ourselves and put away those evil things which ‘quench the Spirit.’

This great grace, then, is not ours without our own effort. No original endowment is enough to keep us right. There must be the daily contact with, and constant renewing of the Holy Ghost. Hence arises a solemn appeal to all Christians.

Note the independence of the Christian character.

'In yourselves.' 'The water that I shall give him shall be in him a fountain,' etc. Not, therefore, derived from the world, nor at second-hand from other men, but you have access to it for yourselves. See that you use the gift. 'Hold fast that which thou hast,' for there are enemies to withstand—carelessness, slothfulness, and self-confidence, etc.

III. The relation to one another of those who possess this energy.

In proportion as Christians have salt in themselves, they will be at peace with one another. Remember that all sin is selfishness; therefore if we are cleansed from it, that which leads to war, alienation, and coldness will be removed. Even in this world there will be an anticipatory picture of the perfect peace which will abound when all are holy. Even now this great hope should make our mutual Christian relations very sweet and helpful.

Thus emerges the great principle that the foundation of the only real love among men must be laid in holiness of heart and life. Where the Spirit of God is working on a heart, there the seeds of evil passions are stricken out. The causes of enmity and disturbance are being removed. Men quarrel with each other because their pride is offended, or because their passionate desires after earthly things are crossed by a successful rival, or because they deem themselves not sufficiently respected by others. The root of all strife is self-love.

It is the root of all sin. The cleansing which takes away the root removes in the same proportion the strife which grows from it. We should not be so ready to stand on our rights if we remembered how we come to have any hopes at all. We should not be so ready to take offence if we thought more of Him who is not soon angry. All the train of alienations, suspicions, earthly passions, which exist in our minds and are sure to issue in quarrels or bad blood, will be put down if we have 'salt in ourselves.'

This makes a very solemn appeal to Christian men. The Church is the garden where this peace should flourish. The disgrace of the Church is its envyings, jealousies, ill-natured scandal, idle gossip, love of pre-eminence, willingness to impute the worst possible motives to one another, sharp eyes for our brother's failings and none for our own. I am not pleading for any mawkish sentimentality, but for a manly peacefulness which comes from holiness. The holiest natures are always the most generous.

What a contrast the Church ought to present to the prevailing tone in the world! Does it? Why not? Because we do not possess the 'salt.' The dove flees from the cawing of rooks and the squabbling of kites and hawks.

The same principle applies to all our human affections. Our loves of all sorts are safe only when they are pure. Contrast the society based on common possession of the one Spirit with the companionships which repose on sin, or only on custom or neighbourhood. In all these there are possibilities of moral peril.

The same principle intensified gives us a picture of heaven and of hell. In the one are the 'solemn troops and sweet societies'; in the other, no peace,

no confidence, no bonds, only isolation, because sin which is selfishness lies at the foundation of the awful condition.

Friends, without that salt our souls are dead and rotting. Here is the great cure. Make it your own. So purified, you will be preserved, but, on the other hand, unchecked sin leads to quick destruction.

The dead, putrefying carcass—what a picture of a soul abandoned to evil and fit only for Gehenna!

## CHILDREN AND CHILDLIKE MEN

'And they brought young children to Him, that He should touch them: and His disciples rebuked those that brought them. 14. But when Jesus saw it, He was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. 15. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.'—MARK x. 13-15.

It was natural that the parents should have wanted Christ's blessing, so that they might tell their children in later days that His hand had been laid on their heads, and that He had prayed for them. And Christ did not think of it as a mere superstition. The disciples were not so akin to the children as He was, and they were a great deal more tender of His dignity than He. They thought of this as an interruption disturbing their high intercourse with Christ. 'These children are always in the way, this is tiresome,' etc.

### I. Christ blessing children.

It is a beautiful picture: the great Messiah with a child in His arms. We could not think of Moses or of Paul in such an attitude. Without it, we should have wanted one of the sweetest, gentlest, most human traits in His character; and how world-wide in its effect that act has been! How many a mother has bent over her child with deeper love; how many a parent has felt the sacredness of the trust more vividly; how many a mother has been drawn nearer to Christ; and how many a little child has had childlike love to Him awakened by it; how much of practical benevolence and of noble sacrifice for children's welfare, how many great institutions, have really sprung from this one deed!

And, if we turn from its effects to its meaning,

it reveals Christ's love for children:—in its human side, as part of His character as man; in its deeper aspect as a revelation of the divine nature. It corrects dogmatic errors by making plain that, prior to all ceremonies or to repentance and faith, little children are loved and blessed by Him. Unconscious infants as these were folded in His arms and love. It puts away all gloomy and horrible thoughts which men have had about the standing of little children.

This is an act of Christ to infants expressive of His love to them, His care over them, their share in His salvation. Baptism is an act of man's, a symbol of his repentance and dying to sin and rising to a new life in Christ, a profession of his faith, an act of obedience to his Lord. It teaches nothing as to the relation of infants to the love of Jesus or to salvation. It does not follow that because that love is most sure and precious, baptism must needs be a sign of it. The question, what does baptism mean, must be determined by examination of texts which speak about baptism; not by a side-light from a text which speaks about something else. There is no more reason for making baptism proclaim that Jesus Christ loves children than for making it proclaim that two and two make four.

## II. The child's nearness to Christ.

'Of such is the kingdom.' 'Except ye be converted and become like little children,' etc. Now this does not refer to innocence; for, as a matter of fact, children are not innocent, as all schoolmasters and nurses know, whatever sentimental poets may say. Innocence is not a qualification for admission to the kingdom. And yet it is true that 'heaven lies about us in our infancy,' and that we are further off from it than when we were children. Nor does it mean that children are naturally

the subjects of the kingdom, but only that the characteristics of the child are those which the man must have, in order to enter the kingdom; that their natural disposition is such as Christ requires to be directed to Him; or, in other words, that childhood has a special adaptation to Christianity. For instance, take dependence, trust, simplicity, unconsciousness, and docility.

These are the very characteristics of childhood, and these are the very emotions of mind and heart which Christianity requires. Add the child's strong faculty of imagination and its implicit belief; making the form of Christianity as the story of a life so easy to them. And we may add too: the absence of intellectual pride; the absence of the habit of dallying with moral truth. Everybody is to the child either a 'good' man or a 'bad.' They have an intense realisation of the unseen; an absence of developed vices and hard worldliness; a faculty of living in the present, free from anxious care and worldly hearts. But while thus they have special adaptation for receiving, they too need to come to Christ. These characteristics do not make Christians. They are to be directed to Christ. 'Suffer them to come unto Me,' the youngest child needs to, can, ought to, come to Christ. And how beautiful their piety is, 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise.' Their fresh, unworn trebles struck on Christ's ear. Children ought to grow up in Christian households, 'innocent from much transgression.' We ought to expect them to grow up Christian.

### III. The child and the Church.

The child is a pattern to us men. We are to learn of them as well as teach them; what they are naturally, we are to strive to become, not childish but childlike. 'Even as a weaned child' (see Psalm cxxxi.). The child-



spirit is glorified in manhood. It is possible for us to retain it, and lose none of the manhood. 'In malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.' The spirit of the kingdom is that of immortal youth.

The children are committed to our care.

The end of all training and care is that they should by voluntary act draw near to Him. This should be the aim in Sunday schools, for instance, and in families, and in all that we do for the poor around us.

See that we do not hinder their coming. This is a wide principle, viz., not to do anything which may interfere with those who are weaker and lower than we are finding their way to Jesus. The Church, and we as individual Christians, too often hinder this 'coming.'

Do not hinder by the presentation of the Gospel in a repellent form, either hardly dogmatic or sour.

Do not hinder by the requirement of such piety as is unnatural to a child.

Do not hinder by inconsistencies. This is a warning for Christian parents in particular.

Do not hinder by neglect. '*Despise* not one of these little ones.'

## ALMOST A DISCIPLE

'And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to Him, and asked Him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? 18. And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou Me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. 19. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. 20. And he answered and said unto Him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. 21. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow Me. 22. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. 23. And Jesus looked round about and saith unto His disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! 24. And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! 25. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. 26. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? 27. And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.'

—MARK x. 17-27.

THERE were courage, earnestness, and humility in this young ruler's impulsive casting of himself at Christ's feet in the way, with such a question. He was not afraid to recognise a teacher in Him whom his class scorned and hated; he was deeply sincere in his wish to possess eternal life, and in his belief that he was ready to do whatever was necessary for that end; he bowed himself as truly as he bent his knees before Jesus, and the noble enthusiasm of youth breathed in his desires, his words, and his gesture.

But his question betrayed the defect which poisoned the much that was right and lovable in him. He had but a shallow notion of what was 'good,' as is indicated by his careless ascription of goodness to one of whom he knew so little as he did of Jesus, and by his conception that it was a matter of deeds. He is too sure of himself; for he thinks that he is ready and able to do all good deeds, if only they are pointed out to him.

How little he understood the resistance of 'the mind of the flesh' to discerned duty! Probably he had had no very strong inclinations to contend against, in living the respectable life that had been his. It is only when we row against the stream that we find out how fast it runs. He was wrong about the connection of good deeds and eternal life, for he thought of them as done by himself, and so of buying it by his own efforts. Fatal errors could not have been condensed in briefer compass, or presented in conjunction with more that is admirable, than in his eager question, asked so modestly and yet so presumptuously.

Our Lord answers with a coldness which startles; but it was meant to rouse, like a dash of icy water flung in the face. 'Why callest thou Me good?' is more than a waving aside of a compliment, or a lesson in accuracy of speech. It rebukes the young man's shallow conception of goodness, as shown by the facility with which he bestowed the epithet. 'None is good save one, even God,' cuts up by the roots his notion of the possibility of self-achieved goodness, since it traces all human goodness to its source in God. If He is the only good, then we cannot perform good acts by our own power, but must receive power from Him. How, then, can any man 'inherit eternal life' by good deeds, which he is only able to do because God has poured some of His own goodness into him? Jesus shatters the young man's whole theory, as expressed in his question, at one stroke.

But while His reply bears directly on the errors in the question, it has a wider significance. Either Jesus is here repudiating the notion of His own sinlessness, and acknowledging, in contradiction to every other disclosure of His self-consciousness, that He too was

not through and through good, or else He is claiming to be filled with God, the source of all goodness, in a wholly unique manner. It is a tremendous alternative, but one which has to be faced. While one is thankful if men even imperfectly apprehend the character and nature of Jesus, one cannot but feel that the question may fairly be put to the many who extol the beauty of His life, and deny His divinity, 'Why callest thou Me good?' Either He is 'God manifest in the flesh,' or He is not 'good.'

The remainder of Christ's answer tends to deepen the dawning conviction of the impossibility of meriting eternal life by acts of goodness, apart from dependence on God. He refers to the second half of the Decalogue only, not as if the first were less important, but because the breaches of the second are more easily brought to consciousness. In thus answering, Jesus takes the standpoint of the law, but for the purpose of bringing to the very opposite conviction from that which the young ruler expresses in reply. He declares that he has kept them all from his youth. Jesus would have had him confess that in them was a code too high to be fully obeyed. 'By the law is the knowledge of sin,' but it had not done its work in this young man. His shallow notion of goodness besets and blinds him still. He is evidently thinking about external deeds, and is an utter stranger to the depths of his own heart. It was an answer betraying great shallowness in his conception of duty and in his self-knowledge.

It is one which is often repeated still. How many of us are there who, if ever we cast a careless glance over our lives, are quite satisfied with their external respectability! As long as the chambers that look to the street are fairly clean, many think that all is right.

But what is there rotting and festering down in the cellars? Do we ever go down there with the 'candle of the Lord' in our hands? If we do, the ruler's boast, 'All these have I kept,' will falter into 'All these have I broken.'

But let us be thankful for the love that shone in Christ's eyes as He looked on him. We may blame; He loved. Jesus saw the fault, but He saw the longing to be better. The dim sense of insufficiency which had driven this questioner to Him was clear to that all-knowing and all-loving heart. Do not let us harshly judge the mistakes of those who would fain be taught, nor regard the professions of innocence, which come from defective perception, as if they were the proud utterances of a Pharisee.

But Christ's love is firm, and can be severe. It never pares down His requirements to make discipleship easier. Rather it attracts by heightening them, and insisting most strenuously on the most difficult surrender. That is the explanation of the stringent demand next made by Him. He touched the poisonous swelling as with a sharp lancet when He called for surrender of wealth. We may be sure that it was this man's money which stood between him and eternal life. If something else had been his chief temptation, that something would have been signalled as needful to be given up. There is no general principle of conduct laid down here, but a specific injunction determined by the individual's character. All diseases are not treated with the same medicines. The command is but Christ's application of His broad requirement, 'If thine eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out.' The principle involved is, surrender what hinders entire following of Jesus. When that sacrifice is

made, we shall be in contact with the fountain of goodness, and have eternal life, not as payment, but as a gift.

‘His countenance fell,’ or, according to Mark’s picturesque word, ‘became lowering,’ like a summer sky when thunder-clouds gather. The hope went out of his heart, and the light faded from his eager face. The prick of the sharp spear had burst the bubble of his superficial earnestness. He had probably never had anything like so repugnant a duty forced upon him, and he cannot bring himself to yield. Like so many of us, he says, ‘I desire eternal life,’ but when it comes to giving up the dearest thing he recoils. ‘Anything else, Lord, thou shalt have, and welcome, but not that.’ And Christ says, ‘That, and nothing else, I must have, if thou art to have Me.’ So this man ‘went away sorrowful.’ His earnestness evaporated; he kept his possessions, and he lost Christ. A prudent bargain! But we may hope that, since ‘he went away sorrowful,’ he felt the ache of something lacking, that the old longings came back, and that he screwed up his resolution to make ‘the great surrender,’ and counted his wealth ‘but dung, that he might win Christ.’

What a world of sad and disappointed love there would be in that look of Jesus to the disciples, as the young ruler went away with bowed head! How graciously He anticipates their probable censure, and turns their thoughts rather on themselves, by the acknowledgment that the failure was intelligible, since the condition was hard! How pityingly His thoughts go after the retreating figure! How universal the application of His words! Riches may become a hindrance to entering the kingdom. They do so when they take the first place in the affections and in the estimates of

good. That danger besets those who have them and those who have them not. Many a poor man is as much caught in the toils of the love of money as the rich are. Jesus modifies the form of His saying when He repeats it in the shape of 'How hardly shall they that trust in riches,' etc. It is difficult to have, and not to trust in them. Rich men's disadvantages as to living a self-sacrificing Christian life are great. To Christ's eyes, their position was one to be dreaded rather than to be envied.

So opposed to current ideas was such a thought, that the disciples, accustomed to think that wealth meant happiness, were amazed. If the same doctrine were proclaimed in any great commercial centre to-day, it would excite no less astonishment. At least, many Christians and others live as if the opposite were true. Wealth possessed, and not trusted in, but used aright, may become a help towards eternal life; but wealth as commonly regarded and employed by its possessors, and as looked longingly after by others, is a real, and in many cases an insuperable, obstacle to entering the strait gate. As soon drive a camel, humps and load and all, through 'a needle's eye,' as get a man who trusts in the uncertainty of riches squeezed through that portal. No communities need this lesson more than our great cities.

No wonder that the disciples thought that, if the road was so difficult for rich men, it must be hard indeed. Christ goes even farther. He declares that it is not only hard, but 'impossible,' for a man by his own power to tread it. That was exactly what the young man had thought that he could do, if only he were directed.

So our Lord's closing words in this context apply, not only to the immediately preceding question by the

disciples, but may be taken as the great truth conveyed by the whole incident. Man's efforts can never put him in possession of eternal life. He must have God's power flowing into him if he is to be such as can enter the kingdom. It is the germ of the subsequent teaching of Paul; 'The gift of God is eternal life.' What we cannot do, Christ has done for us, and does in us. We must yield ourselves to Him, and surrender ourselves, and abandon what stands between us and Him, and then eternal life will enter into us here, and we shall enter into its perfect possession hereafter.



## CHRIST ON THE ROAD TO THE CROSS

'And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed they were afraid.'—MARK x. 32.

WE learn from John's Gospel that the resurrection of Lazarus precipitated the determination of the Jewish authorities to put Christ to death; and that immediately thereafter there was held the council at which, by the advice of Caiaphas, the formal decision was come to. Thereupon our Lord withdrew Himself into the wilderness which stretches south and east of Jerusalem; and remained there for an unknown period, preparing Himself for the Cross. Then, full of calm resolve, He came forth to die. This is the crisis in our Lord's history to which my text refers. The graphic narrative of this Evangelist sets before us the little company on the steep rocky mountain road that leads up from Jericho to Jerusalem; our Lord, far in advance of His followers, with a fixed purpose stamped upon His face, and something of haste in His stride, and that in His whole demeanour which shed a strange astonishment and awe over the group of silent and uncomprehending disciples.

That picture has not attracted the attention that it deserves. I think if we ponder it with sympathetic imagination helping us, we may get from it some very great lessons and glimpses of our Lord's inmost heart in the prospect of His Cross. And I desire simply to set forth two or three of the aspects of Christ's character which these words seem to me to suggest.

I. We have here, then, first, what, for want of a better name, I would call the heroic Christ.

I use the word to express simply strength of will brought to bear in the resistance to antagonism; and although that is a side of the Lord's character which is not often made prominent, it is there, and ought to have its due importance.

We speak of Him, and delight to think of Him, as the embodiment of all loving, gracious, gentle virtues, but Jesus Christ as the ideal man unites in Himself what men are in the habit, somewhat superciliously, of calling the masculine virtues, as well as those which they somewhat contemptuously designate the feminine. I doubt very much whether that is a correct distinction. I think that the heroism of endurance, at all events, is far more an attribute of a woman than of a man. But be that as it may, we are to look to Jesus Christ as presenting before us the very type of all which men call heroism in the sense that I have explained, of an iron will, incapable of deflection by any antagonism, and which coerces the whole nature to obedience to its behests.

There is nothing to be done in life without such a will. 'To be weak is to be miserable, doing or suffering.' And our Master has set us the example of this; that unless there run through a man's life, like the iron framework on the top of the spire of Antwerp Cathedral, on which graceful fancies are strung in stone, the rigid bar of an iron purpose that nothing can bend, the life will be nought and the man will be a failure. Christ is the pattern of heroic endurance, and reads to us the lesson to *resist* and *persist*, whatever stands between us and our goal.

So here, the Cross before Him flung out no repelling

influence towards Him, but rather drew Him to itself. There is no reason that I can find for believing the modern theory of the rationalists' school that our Lord, in the course of His mission, altered His plan, or gradually had dawning upon His mind the conviction that to carry out His purposes He must be a martyr. That seems to me to be an entire misreading of the Gospel narrative which sets before us much rather this, that from the beginning of our Lord's public career there stood unmistakably before Him the Cross as the goal. He entertained no illusions as to His reception. He did not come to do certain work, and, finding that He could not do it, accepted the martyr's rôle; but He came for the twofold purpose of serving by His life, and of redeeming by His death. 'He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for the many.' And this purpose stood clear before Him, drawing Him to itself all through His career.

But, further, Christ's character teaches us what is the highest form of such strength and tenacity, viz., gentleness. There is no need to be brusque, obstinate, angular, self-absorbed, harsh, because we are fixed and determined in our course. These things are the caricatures and the diminutions, not the true forms nor the increase, of strength. The most tenacious steel is the most flexible, and he that has the most fixed and definite resolve may be the man that has his heart most open to all human sympathies, and is strong with the almightiness of gentleness, and not with the less close-knit strength of roughness and of hardness. Christ, because He is perfect love, is perfect power, and His will is fixed because it is love that fixes it. So let us take the lesson that the highest type of strength is

strength in meekness, and that the Master who, I was going to say, kept His strength of will under, but I more correctly say, manifested His strength of will through, His gentleness, is the pattern for us.

II. Then again, we see here not only the heroic, but what I may call the self-sacrificing Christ.

We have not only to consider the fixed will which this incident reveals, but to remember the purpose on which it was fixed, and that He was hastening to His Cross. The very fact of our Lord's going back to Jerusalem, with that decree of the Sanhedrim still in force, was tantamount to His surrender of Himself to death. It was as if, in the old days, some excommunicated man with the decree of the Inquisition pronounced against him had gone into Rome and planted himself in the front of the piazza before the buildings of the Holy Office, and lifted up his testimony there. So Christ, knowing that this council has been held, that this decree stands, goes back, investing of set purpose His return with all the publicity that He can bring to bear upon it. For this once He seems to determine that He will 'cause His voice to be heard in the streets'; He makes as much of a demonstration as the circumstances will allow, and so acts in a manner opposite to all the rest of His life. Why? Because He had determined to bring the controversy to an end. Why? Was He flinging away His life in mere despair? Was He sinfully neglecting precautions? Was the same fanaticism of martyrdom which has often told upon men, acting upon Him? Were these His reasons? No, but He recognised that now that 'hour' of which He spoke so much had come, and of His own loving will offered Himself as our Sacrifice.

It is all-important to keep in view that Christ's death

was His own voluntary act. Whatever external forces were brought to bear in the accomplishment of it, He died because He chose to die. The 'cords' which bound this sacrifice to the horns of the altar were cords woven by Himself.

So I point to the incident of my text, as linking in along with the whole series of incidents marking the last days of our Lord's life, in order to stamp upon His death unmistakably this signature, that it was His own act. Therefore the publicity that was given to His entry; therefore His appearance in the Temple; therefore the increased sharpness and unmistakableness of His denunciations of the ruling classes, the Pharisees and the scribes. Therefore the whole history of the Passion, all culminating in leaving this one conviction, that He had 'power to lay down His life,' that neither Caiaphas nor Annas, nor Judas, nor the band, nor priests, nor the Council, nor Pilate, nor Herod, nor soldiers, nor nails, nor cross, nor all together, killed Jesus, but that Jesus died because He would. The self-sacrifice of the Lord was not the flinging away of the life that He ought to have preserved, nor carelessness, nor the fanaticism of a martyr, nor the enthusiasm of a hero and a champion, but it was the voluntary death of Him who of His own will became in His death the 'oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.' Love to us, and obedience to the Father whose will He made His own, were the cords that bound Christ to the Cross on which He died. His sacrifice was voluntary; witness this fact that when He saw the Cross at hand He strode before His followers to reach that, the goal of His mission.

III. I venture to regard the incident as giving us a little glimpse of what I may call the shrinking Christ.

Do we not see here a trace of something that we all know? May not part of the reason for Christ's haste have been that desire which we all have, when some inevitable grief or pain lies before us, to get it over soon, and to abbreviate the moments that lie between us and it? Was there not something of that feeling in our Lord's sensitive nature when He said, for instance, 'I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished'? 'I am come to send fire upon the earth, and O! how I wish that it were already kindled!' Was there not something of the same feeling, which we cannot call impatient, but which we may call shrinking from the Cross, and therefore seeking to draw the Cross nearer, and have done with it, in the words which He addressed to the betrayer, 'That thou doest, do quickly,' as if He were making a last appeal to the man's humanity, and in effect saying to him, 'If you have a heart at all, shorten these painful hours, and let us have it over'?

And may we not see, in that swift advance in front of the lagging disciples, some trace of the same feeling which we recognise to be so truly human?

Christ *did* shrink from His Cross. Let us never forget that He recoiled from it, with the simple, instinctive, human shrinking from pain and death which is a matter of the physical nervous system, and has nothing to do with the will at all. If there had been no shrinking from it there had been no fixed will. If there had been no natural instinctive drawing back of the physical nature and its connections from the prospect of pain and death, there had been none of the heroism of which I am speaking. Though it does not become us to dogmatise about matters of which we know so little, I think we may fairly say that that shrinking never rose

up into the regions of Christ's will; never became a desire; never became a purpose. Howsoever the ship might be tossed by the waves, the will always kept its level equilibrium. Howsoever the physical nature might incline to this side or to that, the will always kept parallel with the great underlying divine will, the Father's purpose which He had come to effect. There was shrinking which was instinctive and human, but it never disturbed the fixed purpose to die. It had so much power over Him as to make Him march a little faster to the Cross, but it never made Him turn from it. And so He stands before us as the Conqueror in a real conflict, as having yielded Himself up by a real surrender, as having overcome a real difficulty, 'for the joy that was set before Him, having endured the Cross, despising the shame.'

IV. So, lastly, I would see here the lonely Christ.

In front of His followers, absorbed in the thought of what was drawing so near, gathering together His powers in order to be ready for the struggle, with His heart full of the love and the pity which impelled Him, He is surrounded as with a cloud which shuts Him 'out from their sight,' as afterwards the cloud of glory 'received Him.'

What a gulf there was between them and Him, between their thoughts and His, as He passed up that rocky way! What were they thinking about? 'By the way they had disputed amongst themselves which of them should be the greatest.' So far did they sympathise with the Master! So far did they understand Him! Talk about men with unappreciated aims, heroes that have lived through a lifetime of misunderstanding and never have had any one to sympathise with them! There never was such a lonely man in the world

as Jesus Christ. Never was there one that carried so deep in His heart so great a purpose and so great a love, which none cared a rush about. And those that were nearest Him, and loved Him best, loved Him so blunderingly and so blindly that their love must often have been quite as much of a pain as of a joy.

In His Passion that solitude reached the point of agony. How touching in its unconscious pathos is His pleading request, 'Tarry ye here, and watch with Me !' How touching in their revelation of a subsidiary but yet very real addition to His pains are His words, 'All ye shall be offended because of Me this night.' Oh, dear brethren ! every human soul has to go down into the darkness alone, however close may be the clasping love which accompanies us to the portal ; but the loneliness of death was realised by Jesus Christ in a very unique and solemn manner. For round Him there gathered the clouds of a mysterious agony, only faintly typified by the darkness of eclipse which hid the material sun in the universe, what time He died.

And all this solitude, the solitude of unappreciated aims, and unshared purposes, and misunderstood sorrow during life, and the solitude of death with its elements ineffable of atonement ;—all this solitude was borne that no human soul, living or dying, might ever be lonely any more. 'Lo ! I,' whom you all left alone, 'am with you,' who left Me alone, 'even till the end of the world.'

So, dear brethren, ponder that picture that I have been trying very feebly to set before you, of the heroic, self-sacrificing, shrinking, solitary Saviour. Take Him as your Saviour, your Sacrifice, your Pattern ; and hear Him saying, 'If any man serve Me, let him follow Me, and where I am there shall also My servant be.'



An old ecclesiastical legend comes into my mind at the moment, which tells how an emperor won the true Cross in battle from a pagan king, and brought it back, with great pomp, to Jerusalem; but found the gate walled up, and an angel standing before it, who said, 'Thou bringest back the Cross with pomp and splendour. He that died upon it had shame for His companion; and carried it on His back, barefooted, to Calvary.' Then, says the chronicler, the emperor dismounted from his steed, cast off his robes, lifted the sacred Rood on his shoulders, and with bare feet advanced to the gate, which opened of itself, and he entered in.

*We have to go up the steep rocky road that leads from the plain where the Dead Sea is, to Jerusalem. Let us follow the Master, as He strides before us, the Forerunner and the Captain of our salvation.*

## DIGNITY AND SERVICE

'And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto Him, saying, Master, we would that Thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. 36. And He said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? 37. They said unto Him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left hand, in Thy glory. 38. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? 39. And they said unto Him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: 40. But to sit on My right hand and on My left hand is not Mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. 41. And when the Ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. 42. But Jesus called them to Him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. 43. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: 44. And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. 45. For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.'—MARK x. 35-45.

How lonely Jesus was! While He strode before the Twelve, absorbed in thoughts of the Cross to which He was pressing, they, as they followed, 'amazed' and 'afraid,' were thinking not of what He would suffer, but of what they might gain. He saw the Cross. They understood little of it, but supposed that somehow it would bring in the kingdom, and they dimly saw thrones for themselves. Hence James and John try to secure the foremost places, and hence the others' anger at what they thought an unfair attempt to push in front of them. What a contrast between Jesus, striding on ahead with 'set' face, and the Twelve unsympathetic and self-seeking, lagging behind to squabble about pre-eminence! We have in this incident two parts: the request and its answer, the indignation of the Ten and its rebuke. The one sets forth the qualifications for the highest place in the kingdom; the other, the paradox that pre-eminence there is service.

James and John were members of the group of original disciples who stood nearest to Jesus, and of the group of three whom He kept specially at His side. Their present place might well lead them to expect pre-eminence in the kingdom, but their trick was mean, as being an underhand attempt to forestall Peter, the remaining one of the three, as putting forward their mother as spokeswoman, and as endeavouring to entrap Jesus into promising before the disclosure of what was desired. Matthew tells that the mother was brought in order to make the request, and that Jesus brushed her aside by directing His answer to her sons ('Ye know not what *ye* ask'). The attempt to get Jesus' promise without telling what was desired betrayed the consciousness that the wish was wrong. His guarded counter-question would chill them and make their disclosure somewhat hesitating.

Note the strangely blended good and evil of the request. The gold was mingled with clay; selfishness and love delighting in being near Him had both place in it. We may well recognise our own likenesses in these two with their love spotted with self-regard, and be grateful for the gentle answer which did not blame the desire for pre-eminence, but sought to test the love. It was not only to teach them, that He brought them back to think of the Cross which must precede the glory, but because His own mind was so filled with it that He saw that glory only as through the darkness which had to be traversed to reach it. But for us all the question is solemn and heart-searching.

Was not the answer, 'We are able,' too bold? They knew neither what they asked nor what they promised; but just as their ignorant question was partly redeemed by its love, their ignorant vow was ennobled

by its very rashness, as well as by the unfaltering love in it. They did not know what they were promising, but they knew that they loved Him so well that to share anything with Him would be blessed. So it was not in their own strength that the swift answer rushed to their lips, but in the strength of a love that makes heroes out of cowards. And they nobly redeemed their pledge. We, too, if we are Christ's, have the same question put to us, and, weak and timid as we are, may venture to give the same answer, trusting to His strength.

The full declaration of what had been only implied in the previous question follows. Jesus tells the two, and us all, that there are degrees in nearness to Him and in dignity in that future, but that the highest places are not given by favouritism, but attained by fitness. He does not deny that He gives, but only that He gives without regard to qualification. Paul expected the crown from 'the righteous Judge,' and one of these two brethren was chosen to record His promise of giving a seat on His throne to all that overcome. 'Those for whom it is prepared' are those who are prepared for it, and the preparation lies in 'being made conformable to His death,' and being so joined to Him that in spirit and mind we are partakers of His sufferings, whether we are called to partake of them in outward form or not.

The two had had their lesson, and next the Ten were to have theirs. The conversation with the former had been private, for it was hearing of it that made the others so angry. We can imagine the hot words among them as they marched behind Jesus, and how they felt ashamed already when 'He called them.' What they were to be now taught was not so much

the qualifications for pre-eminence in the kingdom, whether here or hereafter, as the meaning of pre-eminence and the service to which it binds. In the world, the higher men are, the more they are served; in Christ's kingdom, both in its imperfect earthly and in its perfect heavenly form, the higher men are, the more they serve. So-called 'Christian' nations are organised on the former un-Christian basis still. But wherever pre-eminence is not used for the general good, there authority rests on slippery foundations, and there will never be social wellbeing or national tranquillity until Christ's law of dignity for service and dignity by service shapes and sweetens society. 'But it is not so among you' laid down the constitution for earth, and not only for some remote heaven; and every infraction of it, sooner or later, brings a Nemesis.

The highest is to be the lowest; for He who is 'higher than the highest' has shown that such is the law which He obeys. The point in the heaven that is highest above our heads is in twelve hours deepest beneath our feet. Fellowship in Christ's sufferings was declared to be the qualification for our sharing in His dignity. His lowly service and sacrificial death are now declared to be the pattern for our use of dignity. Still the thought of the Cross looms large before Jesus, and He is not content with presenting Himself as the pattern of service only, but calls on His disciples to take Him as the pattern of utter self-surrender also. We cannot enter on the great teaching of these words, but can only beseech all who hear them to note how Jesus sets forth His death as the climax of His work, without which even that life of ministering were incomplete; how He ascribes to it the power of ransoming men from bondage and buying them back to God; and of

how He presents even these unparalleled sufferings, which bear or need no repetition as long as the world lasts, as yet being the example to which our lives must be conformed. So His lesson to the angry Ten merges into that to the self-seeking two, and declares to each of us that, if we are ever to win a place at His right hand in His glory, we must here take a place with Him in imitating His life of service and His death of self-surrender for men's good. 'If we endure, we shall also reign with Him.'

## BARTIMÆUS

Blind Bartimæus, the son of Timæus, sat by the highway side begging.'

MARK X. 46.

THE narrative of this miracle is contained in all the Synoptical Gospels, but the accounts differ in two respects—as to the number of men restored to sight, and as to the scene of the miracle. Matthew tells us that there were two men healed, and agrees with Mark in placing the miracle as Jesus was leaving Jericho. Mark says that there was one, and that the place was outside the gate in departing. Luke, on the other hand, agrees with Matthew as to the number, and differs from him and Mark as to the place, which he sets at the entrance into the city. The first of these two discrepancies may very easily be put aside. The greater includes the less; silence is not contradiction. To say that there was one does not deny that there were two. And if Bartimæus was a Christian, and known to Mark's readers, as is probable from the mention of his name, it is easily intelligible how he, being also the chief actor and spokesman, should have had Mark's attention concentrated on him. As to the other discrepancy, many attempts have been made to remove it. None of them are altogether satisfactory. But what does it matter? The apparent contradiction may affect theories as to the characteristics of inspired books, but it has nothing to do with the credibility of the narratives, or with their value for us.

Mark's account is evidently that of an eye-witness. It is full of little particulars which testify thereto. Whether Bartimæus had a companion or not, he was

obviously the chief actor and spokesman. And the whole story seems to me to lend itself to the enforcement of some very important lessons, which I will try to draw from it.

I. Notice the beggar's petition and the attempts to silence it.

Remember that Jesus was now on His last journey to Jerusalem. That night He would sleep at Bethany; Calvary was but a week off. He had paused to win Zacchæus, and now He has resumed His march to His Cross. Popular enthusiasm is surging round Him, and for the first time He does not try to repress it. A shouting multitude are escorting Him out of the city. They have just passed the gates, and are in the act of turning towards the mountain gorge through which runs the Jerusalem road. A long file of beggars is sitting, as beggars do still in Eastern cities, outside the gate, well accustomed to lift their monotonous wail at the sound of passing footsteps. Bartimæus is amongst them. He asks, according to Luke, what is the cause of the bustle, and is told that 'Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.' The name wakes strange hopes in him, which can only be accounted for by his knowledge of Christ's miracles done elsewhere. It is a witness to their notoriety that they had filtered down to be the talk of beggars at city gates. And so, true to his trade, he cries, 'Jesus . . . have mercy upon me!'

Now, note two or three things about that cry. The first is the clear insight into Christ's place and dignity. The multitude said to him, 'Jesus of *Nazareth* passeth by.' That was all they cared for or knew. He cried, 'Jesus, thou *Son of David*,' distinctly recognising our Lord's Messianic character, His power and authority,



and on that power and authority he built a confidence; for he says not as some other suppliants had done, either 'If Thou wilt Thou canst,' or 'If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us.' He is sure of both the power and the will.

Now, it is interesting to notice that this same clear insight other blind men in the Evangelist's story are also represented as having had. Blindness has its compensations. It leads to a certain steadfast brooding upon thoughts, free from disturbing influences. Seeing Jesus did not produce faith; not seeing Him seems to have helped it. It left imagination to work undisturbed, and He was all the loftier to these blind men, because the conceptions of their minds were not limited by the vision of their eyes. At all events, here is a distinct piece of insight into Christ's dignity, power, and will, to which the seeing multitudes were blind.

Note, further, how in the cry there throbs the sense of need, deep and urgent. And note how in it there is also the realisation of the possibility that the widely-flowing blessings of which Bartimæus had heard might be concentrated and poured, in their full flood, upon himself. He individualises himself, *his* need, Christ's power and willingness to help *him*. And because he has heard of so many who have, in like manner, received His healing touch, he comes with the cry, 'Have mercy upon *me*.'

All this is upon the low level of physical blessings needed and desired. But let us lift it higher. It is a mirror in which we may see ourselves, our necessities, and the example of what our desire ought to be. Ah! brethren, the deep consciousness of impotence, need, emptiness, blindness, lies at the bottom of all true

crying to Jesus Christ. If you have never gone to Him, knowing yourself to be a sinful man, in peril, present and future, from your sin, and stained and marred by reason of it, you never have gone to Him in any deep and adequate sense at all. Only when I thus know myself am I driven to cry, 'Jesus! have mercy on me.' And I ask you not to answer to me, but to press the question on your own consciences—'Have I any experience of such a sense of need; or am I groping in the darkness and saying, I see? am I weak as water, and saying I am strong?' 'Thou knowest not that thou art poor, and naked, and blind'; and so that Jesus of Nazareth should be passing by has never moved thy tongue to call, 'Son of David, have mercy upon me!'

Again, this man's cry expressed a clear insight into something at least of our Lord's unique character and power. Brethren, unless we know Him to be all that is involved in that august title, 'the Son of David,' I do not think our cries to Him will ever be very earnest. It seems to me that they will only be so when, on the one hand, we recognise our need of a Saviour, and, on the other hand, behold in Him the Saviour whom we need. I can quite understand—and we may see plenty of illustrations of it all round us—a kind of Christianity real as far as it goes, but in my judgment very superficial, which has no adequate conception of what sin means, in its depth, in its power upon the victim of it, or in its consequences here and hereafter; and, that sense being lacking, the whole scale of Christianity, as it were, is lowered, and Christ comes to be, not, as I think the New Testament tells us that He is, the Incarnate Word of God, who for us men and for our salvation 'bare our sins in His own body on the tree,'

and 'was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him,' but an Example, a Teacher, or a pure Model, or a social Reformer, or the like. If men think of Him only as such, they will never cry to Him, 'Have mercy upon me!'

Dear friends, I pray you, whether you begin with looking into your own hearts and recognising the crawling evils that have made their home there, and thence pass to the thought of the sort of Redeemer that you need and find in Christ—or whether you begin at the other side, and, looking upon the revealed Christ in all the fulness in which He is represented to us in the Gospels, from thence go back to ask yourselves the question, 'What sort of man must I be, if that is the kind of Saviour that I need?'—I pray you ever to blend these two things together, the consciousness of your own need of redemption in His blood and the assurance that by His death we are redeemed, and then to cry, 'Lord! have mercy upon *me*,' and claim your individual share in the wide-flowing blessing. Turn all the generalities of His grace into the particularity of your own possession of it. We have to go one by one to His cross, and one by one to pass through the wicket gate. We have not cried to Him as we ought, if our cry is only 'Christ, have mercy upon us. Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us.' We must be alone with Him, that into our own hearts we may receive all the fulness of His blessing; and our petition must be 'Thou Son of David! have mercy upon *me*.' Have you cried that?

Notice, further, the attempts to stifle the cry. No doubt it was in defence of the Master's dignity, as they construed it, that the people sought to silence the persistent, strident voice piercing through their hosannas.

Ah! they did not know that the cry of wretchedness was far sweeter to Him than their shallow hallelujahs. Christian people of all churches, and of some stiffened churches very especially, have been a great deal more careful of Christ's dignity than He is, and have felt that their formal worship was indecorously disturbed when by chance some earnest voice forced its way through it with the cry of need and desire. But this man had been accustomed for many a day, sitting outside the gate, to reiterate his petition when it was unattended to, and to make it heard amidst the noise of passers-by. So he was persistently bold and importunate and shameless, as the shallow critics thought, in his crying. The more they silenced him, the more a great deal he cried. Would God that we had more crying like that; and that Christ's servants did not so often seek to suppress it, as some of them do! If there are any of you who, by reason of companions, or cares, or habits, or sorrows, or a feeble conception of your own need or a doubtful recognition of Christ's power and mercy, have been tempted to stop your supplications, do like Bartimæus, and the more these, your enemies, seek to silence the deepest voice that is in you, the more let it speak.

II. So, notice Christ's call and the suppliant's response.

'He stood still, and commanded him to be called.' Remember that He was on His road to His Cross, and that the tension of spirit which the Evangelists notice as attaching to Him then, and which filled the disciples with awe as they followed Him, absorbed Him, no doubt, at that hour, so that He heard but little of the people's shouts. But He did hear the blind beggar's cry, and He arrested His march in order to attend to it.

Now, dear friends, I am not merely twisting a Biblical incident round to an interpretation which it does not bear, but am stating a plain un-rhetorical truth when I say that it is so still. Jesus Christ is no dead Christ who is to be remembered only. He is a living Christ who, at this moment, is all that He ever was, and is doing in loftier fashion all the gracious things that He did upon earth. That pause of the King is repeated now, and the quick ear which discerned the difference between the unreal shouts of the crowd, and the agony of sincerity in the cry of the beggar, is still open. He is in the heavens, surrounded by its glories, and, as I think Scripture teaches us, wielding providence and administering the affairs of the universe. He does not need to pause in order to hear you and me. If He did, He would—if I may venture upon such an impossible supposition—bid the hallelujahs of heaven hush themselves, and suspend the operations of His providence if need were, rather than that you or I, or any poor man who cries to Him, should be unheard and unhelpt. The living Christ is as tender a friend, has as quick an ear, is as ready to help at once, to-day, as He was when outside the gate of Jericho; and every one of us may lift his or her poor, thin voice, and it will go straight up to the throne, and not be lost in the clamour of the hallelujahs that echo round His seat. Christ still hears and answers the cry of need. Send you it up, and you will find that true.

Notice the suppliant's response. That is a very characteristic right-about-face of the crowd, who one moment were saying, 'Hold your tongue and do not disturb Him,' and the next moment were all eager to encumber him with help, and to say, 'Rise up, be of

good cheer; He calleth thee.' No thanks to them that He did. And what did the man do? Sprang to his feet—as the word rightly rendered would be—and flung away the frowsy rags that he had wrapped round him for warmth and softness of seat, as he waited at the gate; 'and he came to Jesus.' Brethren, 'casting aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us, let us run' to the same Refuge. You have to abandon something if you are to go to Christ to be healed. I dare say you know well enough what it is. I do not; but certainly there is something that entangles your legs and keeps you from finding your way to Him. If there is nothing else, there is yourself and your trust in self, and that is to be put away. Cast away the 'garment spotted with the flesh' and go to Christ, and you will receive succour.

III. Notice the question of all-granting love, and the answer of conscious need.

'What wilt Thou that I should do unto thee?' A very few hours before He had put the same question with an entirely different significance, when the sons of Zebedee came to Him, and tried to get Him to walk blindfold into a promise. He upset their scheme with the simple question, 'What is it that you want?' which meant, 'I must know and judge before I commit Myself.' But when He said the same thing to Bartimæus He meant exactly the opposite. It was putting the key of the treasure-house into the beggar's hand. It was the implicit pledge that whatever he desired he should receive. He knew that the thing this man wanted was the thing that He delighted to give.

But the tenderness of these words, and the gracious promise that is hived in them, must not make us forget the singular authority that speaks in them. Think of a

man doing as Jesus Christ did—standing before another and saying, ‘I will give you anything that you want.’ He must be either a madman or a blasphemer, or ‘God manifest in the flesh’; Almighty power guided by infinite love.

And what said the man? He had no doubt what he wanted most—the opening of these blind eyes of his. And, dear brother, if we knew ourselves as well as Bartimæus knew his blindness, we should have as little doubt what it is that we need most. Suppose you had this wishing-cap that Christ put on Bartimæus’s head put on yours: what would you ask? It is a penetrating question if men will answer it honestly. Think what you consider to be your chief need. Suppose Jesus Christ stood where I stand, and spoke to you: ‘What wilt thou that I should do for you?’ If you are a wise man, if you know yourself and Him, your answer will come as swiftly as the beggar’s—‘Lord! heal me of my blindness, and take away my sin, and give me Thy salvation.’ There is no doubt about what it is that every one of us needs most. And there should be no doubt as to what each of us would ask first.

The supposition that I have been making is realised. That gracious Lord is here, and is ready to give you the satisfaction of your deepest need, if you know what it is, and will go to Him for it. ‘Ask! and ye shall receive.’

IV. Lastly, notice, sight given, and the Giver followed.

Bartimæus had scarcely ended speaking when Christ began. He was blind at the beginning of Christ’s little sentence; he saw at the end of it. ‘Go thy way; thy faith hath saved thee.’ The answer came instantly,

and the cure was as immediate as the movement of Christ's heart in answer.

I am here to proclaim the possibility of an immediate passage from darkness to light. Some folk look askance at us when we talk about sudden conversions, but these are perfectly reasonable; and the experience of thousands asserts that they are actual. As soon as we desire, we have, and as soon as we have, we see. Whenever the lungs are opened the air rushes in; sometimes the air opens the lungs that it may. The desire is all but contemporaneous with the fulfilment, in Christ's dealing with men. The message is flashed along the wire from earth to heaven, in an incalculably brief space of time, and the answer comes, swift as thought and swifter than light. So, dear friends, there is no reason whatever why a similar instantaneous change should not pass over any man who hears the Good News. He may be unsaved when his hearing of it begins, and saved when his hearing of it ends. It is for himself to settle whether it shall be so or not.

Here we have a clear statement of the path by which Christ's mercy rushes into a man's soul. 'Thy faith hath saved thee.' But it was Christ's power that saved him. Yes, it was; but it was faith that made it possible for Christ's power to make him whole. Physical miracles indeed did not always require trust in Christ, as a preceding condition, but the possession of Christ's salvation does, and cannot but do so. There must be trust in Him, in order that we may partake of the salvation which is owing solely to His power, His love, His work upon the Cross. The condition is for us; the power comes from Him. My faith is the hand that grasps His; it is His hand, not mine, that holds



me up. My faith lays hold of the rope; it is the rope and the Person above who holds it, that lift me out of the 'horrible pit and the miry clay.' My faith flees for refuge to the city; it is the city that keeps me safe from the avenger of blood. Brother! exercise that faith, and you will receive a better sight than was poured into Bartimæus's eyes.

Now, all this story should be the story of each one of us. One modification we have to make upon it, for we do not need to cry persistently for mercy, but to trust in, and to take, the mercy that is offered. One other difference there is between Bartimæus and many of my hearers. He knew what he needed, and some of you do not. But Christ is calling us all, and my business now is to say to each of you what the crowd said to the beggar, 'Rise! be of good cheer; He calleth thee.' If you will fling away your hindrances, and grope your path to His feet, and fall down before Him, knowing your deep necessity, and trusting to Him to supply it, He will save you. Your new sight will gaze upon your Redeemer, and you will follow Him in the way of loving trust and glad obedience.

Jesus Christ was passing by. He was never to be in Jericho any more. If Bartimæus did not get His sight then, he would be blind all his days. Christ and His salvation are offered to thee, my brother, now. Perhaps if you let Him pass, you will never hear Him call again, and may abide in the darkness for ever. Do not run the risk of such a fate.

## AN EAGER COMING

‘And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.’—MARK x. 50.

MARK’S vivid picture—long wail of the man, crowd silencing him, but wheeling round when Christ calls him—and the quick energy of the beggar, flinging away his cloak, springing to his feet—and blind as he was, groping his way.

I. What we mean by coming to Jesus :—faith, communion, occupation of mind, heart, and will.

II. How eagerly we shall come when we are conscious of need. This man wanted his eyesight : do we not want too ?

III. We must throw off our hindrances if we would come to Him. Impediments of various kinds. ‘Lay aside every weight’—not only sins, but even right things that hinder. Occupations, pursuits, affections, possessions, sometimes have to be put away altogether ; sometimes but to be minimised and kept in restraint. There is no virtue in self-denial except as it helps us to come nearer Him.

IV. We must do it with quick, glad energy. Bartimæus springs to his feet at once with a bound. So we should leap to meet Jesus, our sight-giver. How slothful and languid we often are. We do not put half as much heart into our Christian life as people do into common things. Far more pains are taken by a ballet-dancer to learn her posturing than by most Christians to keep near Christ.

## LOVE'S QUESTION

‘What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?’—MARK x. 51.

‘What wilt Thou have me to do?’—ACTS ix. 6.

CHRIST asks the first question of a petitioner, and the answer is a prayer for sight. Saul asks the second question of Jesus, and the answer is a command. Different as they are, we may bring them together. The one is the voice of love, desiring to be besought in order that it may bestow; the other is the voice of love, desiring to be commanded in order that it may obey.

Love delights in knowing, expressing, and fulfilling the beloved's wishes.

I. The communion of Love delights on both sides in knowing the beloved's wishes. Christ delights in knowing ours. He encourages us to speak though He knows, because it is pleasant to Him to hear, and good for us to tell. His children delight in knowing His will.

II. It delights in expressing wishes—His commandments are the utterance of His Love: His Providences are His loving ways of telling us what He desires of us, and if we love Him as we ought, both commandments and providences will be received by us as lovers do gifts that have ‘with my love’ written on them.

On the other hand, our love will delight in telling Him what we wish, and to speak all our hearts to Jesus will be our instinct in the measure of our love to Him.

III. It delights in fulfilling wishes—puts key of treasure-house into our hands. He refused John and James. Be sure that He does still delight to give us our desires, and so be sure that when any of these are

not granted there must be some loving reason for refusal.

Our delight should be in obedience, and only when our wills are submitted to His does He say to us, 'What wilt thou?' 'If ye abide in Me and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you.'

## A ROYAL PROGRESS

'... Go your way into the village over against you : and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat ; loose him, and bring him.'  
—MARK XI. 2.

Two considerations help us to appreciate this remarkable incident of our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The first of these is its date. It apparently occurred on the Sunday of the Passion Week. The Friday saw the crosses on Calvary. The night before, Jesus had sat at the modest feast that was prepared in Bethany, where Lazarus was one of the guests, Martha was the busy servant, and Mary poured out the lavish treasures of her love upon His feet. The resurrection of Lazarus had created great popular excitement ; and that excitement is the second consideration which throws light upon this incident. The people had rallied round Christ, and, consequently, the hatred of the official and ecclesiastical class had been raised to boiling-point. It was at that time that our Lord deliberately presented Himself before the nation as the Messiah, and stirred up still more this popular enthusiasm. Now, if we keep these two things in view, I think we shall be at the right point from which to consider the whole incident. To it, and not merely to the words which I have chosen as our starting-point, I wish to draw attention now. I am mistaken if there are not in it very important and practical lessons for ourselves.

I. First, note that deliberate assumption by Christ of royal authority.

I shall have a good deal to say presently about the

main fact which bears upon that, but in the meantime I would note, in passing, a subsidiary illustration of it, in the errand on which He sent these messengers to the little 'village over against' them; and in the words which He put into their mouths. They were to go, and, without a word, to loose and bring away the colt fastened at a door, where it was evidently waiting the convenience of its owner to mount it. If, as was natural, any objection or question was raised, they were to answer exactly as servants of a king would do, if he sent them to make requisition on the property of his subjects, 'The Lord hath need of him.'

I do not dwell on our Lord's supernatural knowledge as coming out here; nor on the fact that the owner of the colt was probably a partial disciple, perhaps a secret one—ready to recognise the claim that was made. But I ask you to notice here the assertion, in act and word, of absolute authority, to which all private convenience and rights of possession are to give way unconditionally. The Sovereign's need is a sovereign reason. What He requires He has a right to take. Well for us, brethren, if we yield as glad, as swift, and as unquestioning obedience to His claims upon us, and upon our possessions, as that poor peasant of Bethphage gave in the incident before us!

But there is not only the assertion, here, of absolute authority, but note how, side by side with this royal style, there goes the acknowledgment of poverty. Here is a pauper King, who having nothing yet possesses all things. 'The Lord'—that is a great title—'hath need of him'—that is a strange verb to go with such a nominative. But this little sentence, in its two halves of authority and of dependence, puts into four words the whole blessed paradox of the life

of Jesus Christ upon earth. 'Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor'; and being Lord and Owner of all things, yet owed His daily bread to ministering women, borrowed a boat to preach from, a house wherein to lay His head, a shroud and a winding-sheet to enfold His corpse, a grave in which to lie, and from which to rise, 'the Lord of the dead and of the living.'

Not only so, but there is another thought suggested by these words. The accurate, or, at least, the probable reading, of one part of the third verse is given in the Revised Version, 'Say ye that the Lord hath need of him, and straightway he will send him *back* hither.' That is to say, these last words are not Christ's assurance to His two messengers that their embassy would succeed, but part of the message which He sends by them to the owner of the colt, telling him that it was only a loan which was to be returned. Jesus Christ is debtor to no man. Anything given to Him comes back again. Possessions yielded to that Lord are recompensed a hundredfold in this life, if in nothing else in that there is a far greater sweetness in that which still remains. 'What I gave I have,' said the wise old epitaph. It is always true. Do you not think that the owner of the patient beast, on which Christ placidly paced into Jerusalem on His peaceful triumph, would be proud all his days of the use to which his animal had been put, and would count it as a treasure for the rest of its life? If you and I will yield our gifts to Him, and lay them upon His altar, be sure of this, that the altar will ennoble and will sanctify all that is laid upon it. All that we have rendered to Him gains fragrance from His touch, and comes back to us tenfold more precious because He has condescended to use it.

So, brethren, He still moves amongst us, asking for our surrender of ourselves and of our possessions to Him, and pledging Himself that we shall lose nothing by what we give to Him, but shall be infinitely gainers by our surrender. He still needs us. Ah! if He is ever to march in triumph through the world, and be hailed by the hosannas of all the tribes of the earth, it is requisite for that triumph that His children should surrender first themselves, and then all that they are, and all that they have, to Him. To us there comes the message, 'The Lord hath need of you.' Let us see that we answer as becomes us.

But then, more important is the other instance here of this assertion of royal authority. I have already said that we shall not rightly understand it unless we take into full account the state of popular feeling at the time. We find in John's Gospel great stress laid on the movement of curiosity and half-belief which followed on the resurrection of Lazarus. He tells us that crowds came out from Jerusalem the night before to gaze upon the Lifebringer and the quickened man. He also tells us that another enthusiastic crowd flocked out of Jerusalem before Jesus sent for the colt to the neighbouring village. We are to keep in mind, therefore, that what He did here was done in the midst of a great outburst of popular enthusiasm. We are to keep in mind, too, the season of Passover, when religion and patriotism, which were so closely intertwined in the life of the Jews, were in full vigorous exercise. It was always a time of anxiety to the Roman authorities, lest this fiery people should break out into insurrection. Jerusalem at the Passover was like a great magazine of combustibles, and into it Jesus flung a lighted brand amongst the inflammable substances



that were gathered there. We have to remember, too, that all His life long He had gone exactly on the opposite tack. Remember how He betook Himself to the mountain solitudes when they wanted to make Him a king. Remember how He was always damping down Messianic enthusiasm. But here, all at once, He reverses His whole conduct, and deliberately sets Himself to make the most public and the most exciting possible demonstration that He was 'King of Israel.'

For what was it that He did? Our Evangelist here does not quote the prophecy from Zechariah, but two other Evangelists do. Our Lord then deliberately dressed Himself by the mirror of prophecy, and assumed the very characteristics which the prophet had given long ago as the mark of the coming King of Zion. If He had wanted to excite a popular commotion, that is what He would have done.

Why did He act thus? He was under no illusion as to what would follow. For the night before He had said: 'She hath come beforehand to anoint My body for the burial.' He knew what was close before Him in the future. And, because He knew that the end was at hand, He felt that, once at least, it was needful that He should present Himself solemnly, publicly, I may almost say ostentatiously, before the gathered nation, as being of a truth the Fulfiller and the fulfilment of all the prophecies and the hopes built upon them that had burned in Israel, with a smoky flame indeed, but for so many ages. He also wanted to bring the rulers to a point. I dare not say that He precipitated His death, or provoked a conflict, but I do say that deliberately, and with a clear understanding of what He was doing, He took a step which forced them to show their hand. For after such a public avowal of who He was, and

such public hosannas surging round His meek feet as He rode into the city, there were but two courses open for the official class: either to acknowledge Him, or to murder Him. Therefore He reversed His usual action, and deliberately posed, by His own act, as claiming to be the Messiah long prophesied and long expected.

Now, what do you think of the man that did that? *If* He did it, then either He is what the rulers called Him, a 'deceiver,' swollen with inordinate vanity and unfit to be a teacher, or else we must fall at His feet and say 'Rabbi! Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel.' I venture to believe that to extol Him and to deny the validity of His claims is in flagrant contradiction to the facts of His life, and is an unreasonable and untenable position.

II. Notice the revelation of a new kind of King and Kingdom.

Our Evangelist, from whom my text is taken, has nothing to say about Zechariah's prophecy which our Lord set Himself to fulfil. He only dwells on the pathetic poverty of the pomp of the procession. But other Evangelists bring into view the deeper meaning of the incident. The centre-point of the prophecy, and of Christ's intentional fulfilment of it, lies in the symbol of the meek and patient animal which He bestrode. The ass was, indeed, used sometimes in old days by rulers and judges in Israel, but the symbol was chosen by the prophet simply to bring out the peacefulness and the gentleness inherent in the Kingdom, and the King who thus advanced into His city. If you want to understand the meaning of the prophet's emblem, you have only to remember the sculptured slabs of Assyria and Babylon, or the paintings on the walls of Egyptian temples and tombs, where Sennacherib or

Rameses ride hurtling in triumph in their chariots, over the bodies of prostrate foes; and then to set by the side of these, 'Rejoice! O daughter of Zion; thy King cometh unto thee riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.' If we want to understand the significance of this sweet emblem, we need only, further, remember the psalm that, with poetic fervour, invokes the King: 'Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O Most Mighty, and in Thy majesty ride prosperously . . . and Thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies; the people fall under Thee.' That is all that that ancient singer could conceive of the triumphant King of the world, the Messiah; a conqueror, enthroned in His chariot, and the twanging bowstring, drawn by His strong hand, impelling the arrow that lodged in the heart of His foes. And here is the fulfilment. 'Go ye into the village over against you, and ye shall find a colt tied. . . . And they set Him thereon.' Christ's kingdom, like its King, has no power but gentleness and the omnipotence of patient love.

If 'Christian' nations, as they are called, and Churches had kept the significance of that emblem in mind, do you think that their hosannas would have gone up so often for conquerors on the battle-fields; or that Christian communities would have been in complicity with war and the glorifying thereof, as they have been? And, if Christian churches had remembered and laid to heart the meaning of this triumphal entry, and its demonstration of where the power of the Master lay, would they have struck up such alliances with worldly powers and forms of force as, alas! have weakened and corrupted the Church for hundreds of years? Surely, surely, there is no more

manifest condemnation of war and the warlike spirit, and of the spirit which finds the strength of Christ's Church in anything material and violent, than is that solitary instance of His assumption of royal state when thus He entered into His city. I need not say a word, brethren, about the nature of Christ's kingdom as embodied in His subjects, as represented in that shouting multitude that marched around Him. How Cæsar in his golden house in Rome would have sneered and smiled at the Jewish peasant, on the colt, and surrounded by poor men, who had no banners but the leafy branches from the trees, and no pomp to strew in his way but their own worn garments! And yet these were stronger in their devotion, in their enthusiastic conviction that He was the King of Israel and of the whole earth, than Cæsar, with all his treasures and with all his legions and their sharp swords. Christ accepts poor homage because He looks for hearts; and whatever the heart renders is sweet to Him. He passes on through the world, hailed by the acclamations of grateful hearts, needing no bodyguard but those that love Him; and they need to bear no weapons in their hands, but their mission is to proclaim with glad hearts hosannas to the King that 'cometh in the name of the Lord.'

There is one more point that I may note. Another of the Evangelists tells us that it was when the humble cortège swept round the shoulder of Olivet, and caught sight of the city gleaming in the sunshine, across the Kedron valley, that they broke into the most rapturous of their hosannas, as if they would call to the city that came in view to rejoice and welcome its King. And what was the King doing when that sight burst upon Him, and while the acclamations eddied round Him? His thoughts were far away. His eyes with

divine prescience looked on to the impending end, and then they dimmed, and filled with tears; and He wept over the city.

That is our King; a pauper King, a meek and patient King, a King that delights in the reverent love of hearts, a King whose armies have no swords, a King whose eyes fill with tears as He thinks of men's woes and cries. Blessed be such a King!

III. Lastly, we have the Royal visitation of the Temple.

Our Evangelist has no word to speak about the march of the procession down into the valley, and up on the other side, and through the gate, and into the narrow streets of the city that was 'moved' as they passed through it. His language sounds as if he considered that our Lord's object in entering Jerusalem at all was principally to enter the Temple. He 'looked round on all things' that were there. Can we fancy the keen observance, the recognition of the hidden bad and good, the blazing indignation, and yet dewy pity, in those eyes? His visitation of the Temple was its inspection by its Lord. And it was an inspection in order to cleanse. To-day He looked; to-morrow He wielded the whip of small cords. His chastisement is never precipitate. Perfect knowledge wields His scourge, and pronounces condemnation.

Brethren, Jesus Christ comes to us as a congregation, to the church to which we belong, and to us individually, with the same inspection. He whose eyes are a flame of fire, says to His churches to-day, 'I know thy works.' What would He think if He came to us and tested us?

In the incident of my text He was fulfilling another ancient prophecy, which says, 'The Lord shall suddenly

come to His Temple, and . . . sit as a refiner of silver . . . like a refiner's fire and as fuller's soap . . . and He shall purify the sons of Levi. . . . Then shall the offering of Jerusalem be pleasant, as in the days of old.'

We need nothing more, we should desire nothing more earnestly, than that He would come to us: 'Search me, O Christ, and know me. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.' Jesus Christ is the King of England as truly as of Zion; and He is your King and mine. He comes to each of us, patient, meek, loving; ready to bless and to cleanse. Dear brother, do you open your heart to Him? Do you acknowledge Him as your King? Do you count it your highest honour if He will use you and your possessions, and condescend to say that He has need of such poor creatures as we are? Do you cast your garments in the way, and say: 'Ride on, great Prince'? Do you submit yourself to His inspection, to His cleansing?

Remember, He came once on 'a colt, the foal of an ass, meek, and having salvation.' He will come 'on the white horse, in righteousness to judge and to make war,' and with power to destroy.

Oh! I beseech you, welcome Him as He comes in gentle love, that when He comes in judicial majesty you may be among the 'armies of heaven that follow after,' and from immortal tongues utter rapturous and undying hosannas.

## CHRIST'S NEED OF US AND OURS

'... Say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither.'—MARK xi. 3.

You will remember that Jesus Christ sent two of His disciples into the village that looked down on the road from Bethany to Jerusalem, with minute instructions and information as to what they were to do and find there. The instructions may have one of two explanations—they suggest either superhuman knowledge or a previous arrangement. Perhaps, although it is less familiar to our thoughts, the latter is the explanation. There is a remarkable resemblance, in that respect, to another incident which lies close beside this one in time, when our Lord again sent two disciples to make preparation for the Passover, and, with similar minuteness, told them that they would find, at a certain point, a man bearing a pitcher of water. Him they were to accost, and he would take them to the room that had been prepared. Now the old explanation of both these incidents is that Jesus Christ knew what was going to happen. Another possible explanation, and in my view more probable and quite as instructive, is, that Jesus Christ had settled with the two owners what was to happen. Clearly, the owner of the colt was a disciple, because at once he gave up his property when the message was repeated, 'the *Lord* hath need of him.' Probably he had been one of the guests at the modest festival that had been held the night before, in the village close by, in Simon's house, and had seen how Mary had expended her most precious possession on the Lord, and, under the influence of the resurrection of Lazarus, he, too, perhaps, was touched, and was glad to

arrange with Jesus Christ to have his colt waiting there at the cross-road for his Master's convenience. But, be that as it may, it seems to me that this incident, and especially these words that I have read for a text, carry very striking and important lessons for us, whether we look at them in connection with the incident itself, or whether we venture to give them a somewhat wider application. Let me take these two points in turn.

I. Now, what strikes one about our Lord's requisitioning the colt is this, that here is a piece of conduct on His part singularly unlike all the rest of His life. All through it, up to this last moment, His one care was to damp down popular enthusiasm, to put on the drag whenever there came to be the least symptom of it, to discourage any reference to Him as the Messiah-King of Israel, to shrink back from the coarse adulation of the crowd, and to glide quietly through the world, blessing and doing good. But now, at the end, He flings off all disguise. He deliberately sets Himself, at a time when popular enthusiasm ran highest and was most turbid and difficult to manage, at the gathering of the nation for the Passover in Jerusalem, to cast an effervescing element into the caldron. If He had planned to create a popular rising, He could not have done anything more certain to bring it about than what He did that morning when He made arrangements for a triumphal procession into the city, amidst the excited crowds gathered from every quarter of the land. Why did He do that? What was the meaning of it?

Then there is another point in this requisitioning of the colt. He not only deliberately set Himself to stir up popular excitement, but He consciously did



what would be an outward fulfilment of a great Messianic prophecy. I hope you are wiser than to fancy that Zechariah's prophecy of the peaceful monarch who was to come to Zion, meek and victorious, and riding upon a 'colt the foal of an ass,' was fulfilled by the outward fact of Christ being mounted on this colt 'whereon never man sat.' That is only the shell, and if there had been no such triumphal entry, our Lord would as completely have fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy. The fulfilment of it did not depend on the petty detail of the animal upon which He sat when He entered the city, nor even on that entrance. The meaning of the prophecy was that to Zion, wherever and whatever it is, there should come that Messianic King, whose reign owed nothing to chariots and horses and weapons of war for its establishment, but who, meek and patient, pacing upon the humble animal used only for peaceful services, and not mounted on the prancing steed of the warrior, should inaugurate the reign of majesty and of meekness. Our Lord uses the external fact just as the prophet had used it, as of no value in itself, but as a picturesque emblem of the very spirit of His kingdom. The literal fulfilment was a kind of finger-post for inattentive onlookers, which might induce them to look more closely, and so see that He was indeed the King Messiah, because of more important correspondences with prophecy than His once riding on an ass. Do not so degrade these Old Testament prophecies as to fancy that their literal fulfilment is of chief importance. That is the shell: the kernel is the all-important thing, and Jesus Christ would have fulfilled the *rôle*, that was sketched for Him by the prophets of old, just as completely if there never had been this entrance into Jerusalem.

But, further, the fact that He had to borrow the colt was as significant as the choice of it. For so we see blended two things, the blending of which makes the unique peculiarity and sublimity of Christ's life: absolute authority, and meekness of poverty and lowliness. A King, and yet a pauper-King! A King claiming His dominion, and yet obliged to borrow another man's colt in order that He might do it! A strange kind of monarch!—and yet that remarkable combination runs through all His life. He had to be obliged to a couple of fishermen for a boat, but He sat in it, to speak words of divine wisdom. He had to be obliged to a lad in the crowd for barley loaves and fishes, but when He took them into His hands they were multiplied. He had to be obliged for a grave, and yet He rose from the borrowed grave the Lord of life and death. And so when He would pose as a King, He has to borrow the regalia, and to be obliged to this anonymous friend for the colt which made the emphasis of His claim. 'Who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich.'

II. And now turn for a moment to the wider application of these words.

'The Lord hath need of him.' That opens the door to thoughts, that I cannot crowd into the few minutes that I have at my disposal, as to that great and wonderful truth that Christ cannot assume His kingdom in this world without your help, and that of the other people whose hearts are touched by His love. 'The Lord hath need' of them. Though upon that Cross of Calvary He did all that was necessary for the redemption of the world and the salvation of humanity as a whole, yet for the bearing of that blessing into individual hearts, and for the application of the full powers

that are stored in the Gospel and in Jesus, to their work in the world, the missing link is man. We 'are fellow-labourers with God.' We are Christ's tools. The instruments by which He builds His kingdom are the souls that have already accepted His authority. 'The Lord hath need of him,' though, as the psalmist sings, 'If I were hungry I would not tell thee, for all the beasts of the forest are Mine.' Yes, and when the Word was made flesh, He had need of one of the humblest of the beasts. The Christ that redeemed the world needs us, to carry out and to bring into effect His redemption. 'God mend all,' said one, and the answer was, 'We must help Him to mend it.'

Notice again the authoritative demand, which does not contemplate the possibility of reluctance or refusal. 'The Lord hath need of him.' That is all. There is no explanation or motive alleged to induce surrender to the demand. This is a royal style of speech. It is the way in which, in despotic countries, kings lay their demands upon a poor man's whole plenishing and possession, and sweep away all.

Jesus Christ comes to us in like fashion, and brushes aside all our convenience and everything else, and says, 'I want you, and that is enough.' Is it not enough? Should it not be enough? If He demands, He has the right to demand. For we are His, 'bought with a price.' All the slave's possessions are his owner's property. The slave is given a little patch of garden ground, and perhaps allowed to keep a fowl or two, but the master can come and say, 'Now I want them,' and the slave has nothing for it but to give them up.

'The Lord hath need of him' is in the autocratic tone of One who has absolute power over us and ours. And that power, where does it come from? It comes from

His absolute surrender of Himself to us, and because He has wholly given Himself for us. He does not expect us to say one contrary word when He sends and says, 'I have need of you, or of yours.'

Here, again, we have an instance of glad surrender. The last words of my text are susceptible of a double meaning. 'Straightway he will send him hither'—who is 'he'? It is usually understood to be the owner of the colt, and the clause is supposed to be Christ's assurance to the two messengers of the success of their errand. So understood, the words suggest the great truth that Love loosens the hand that grasps possessions, and unlocks our treasure-houses. There is nothing more blessed than to give in response to the requirement of love. And so, to Christ's authoritative demand, the only proper answer is obedience swift and glad, because it is loving. Many possibilities of joy and blessing are lost by us through not yielding on the instant to Christ's demands. Hesitation and delay are dangerous. In 'straightway' complying are security and joy. If the owner had begun to say to himself that he very much needed the colt, or that he saw no reason why some one else's beast should not have been taken, or that he would send the animal very soon, but must have the use of him for an hour or two first, he would probably never have sent him at all, and so would have missed the greatest honour of his life. As soon as I know what Christ wants from me, without delay let me do it; for if I begin with delaying I shall probably end with declining. The Psalmist was wise when he laid emphasis on the swiftness of his obedience, and said, 'I made haste and delayed not, but made haste to keep Thy commandments.'

But another view of the words makes them part of the message to the owner of the colt, and not of the assurance to the disciples. 'Say ye that the Lord hath need of him, and that straightway (when He has done with him) He will send him back again.' That is a possible rendering, and I am disposed to think it is the proper one. By it the owner is told that he is not parting with his property for good and all, that Jesus only wishes to borrow the animal for the morning, and that it will be returned in the afternoon. What does that view of the words suggest to us? Do you not think that that colt, when it did come back—for of course it came back some time or other,—was a great deal more precious to its owner than it ever had been before, or ever could have been if it had not been lent to Christ, and Christ had not made His royal entry upon it? Can you not fancy that the man, if he was, as he evidently was, a disciple and lover of the Lord, would look at it, especially after the Crucifixion and the Ascension, and think, 'What an honour to me, that I provided the mount for that triumphal entry!?' It is always so. If you wish anything to become precious, lend it to Jesus Christ, and when it comes back again, as it will come back, there will be a fragrance about it, a touch of His fingers will be left upon it, a memory that He has used it. If you desire to own yourselves, and to make yourselves worth owning, give yourselves to Christ. If you wish to get the greatest possible blessing and good out of possessions, lay them at His feet. If you wish love to be hallowed, joy to be calmed, perpetuated, and deepened, carry it to Him. 'If the house be worthy, your peace shall rest upon it; if not,' like the dove to the ark when it could find no footing in the turbid and drowned world, 'it shall come back to you again.'

Straightway He will 'send him back again,' and that which I give to Jesus He will return enhanced, and it will be more truly and more blessedly mine, because I have laid it in His hands. This 'altar' sanctifies the giver and the gift.

## NOTHING BUT LEAVES

‘And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, He came, if haply He might find any thing thereon: and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves; . . . 14. And Jesus . . . said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever.’—**MARK xi. 13, 14.**

**THE** date of this miracle has an important bearing on its meaning and purpose. It occurred on the Monday morning of the last week of Christ's ministry. That week saw His last coming to Israel, ‘if haply He might find any thing thereon.’ And if you remember the foot-to-foot duel with the rulers and representatives of the nation, and the words, weighty with coming doom, which He spoke in the Temple on the subsequent days, you will not doubt that the explanation of this strange and anomalous miracle is that it is an acted parable, a symbol of Israel in its fruitlessness and in its consequent barrenness to all coming time.

This is the only point of view, as it seems to me, from which the peculiarities of the miracle can either be warranted or explained. It is our Lord's only destructive act. The fig-tree grew by the wayside; probably, therefore, it belonged to nobody, and there was no right of property affected by its loss. He saw it from afar, ‘having leaves,’ and that was why, three months before the time, He went to look if there were figs on it. For experts tell us that in the fig-tree the leaves accompany, and do not precede, the fruit. And so this one tree, brave in its show of foliage amidst leafless companions, was a hypocrite unless there

were figs below the leaves. Therefore Jesus came, if haply He might find anything thereon, and finding nothing, perpetuated the condition which He found, and made the sin its own punishment.

Now all that is plain symbol, and so I ask you to look with me, for a few moments, at these three things—(1) What Christ sought and seeks; (2) What He found and often finds; (3) What He did when He found it.

#### I. What Christ sought and seeks.

He came 'seeking fruit.' Now I may just notice, in passing, how pathetically and beautifully this incident suggests to us the true, dependent, weak manhood of that great Lord. In all probability He had just come from the home of Mary and Martha, and it is strange that having left their hospitable abode He should be 'an hungered.' But so it was. And even with all the weight of the coming crisis pressing upon His soul, He was conscious of physical necessities, as one of us might have been, and perhaps felt the more need for sustenance because so terrible a conflict was waiting Him. Nor, I think, need we shrink from recognising another of the characteristics of humanity here, in the limitations of His knowledge and in the real expectation, which was disappointed, that He might find fruit where there were leaves. I do not want to plunge into depths far too deep for any man to find sure footing in, nor seek to define the undefinable, nor to explain how the divine inosculates with the human, but sure I am that Jesus Christ was not getting up a scene in order to make a parable out of His miracle; and that the hunger and the expectancy and the disappointment were all real, however they afterwards may have been turned by Him to a symbolical



purpose. And so here we may see the weak Christ, the limited Christ, the true human Christ. But side by side, as is ever the case, with this manifestation of weakness, there comes an apocalypse of power. Wherever you have, in the history of our Lord, some signal exemplification of human infirmity, you have flashed out through 'the veil, that is, His flesh,' some beam of His glory. Thus this hungry Man could say, 'No fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever'; and His bare word, the mere forth-putting and manifestation of His will, had power on material things. That is the sign and impress of divinity.

But I pass from that, which is not my special point now. What did Christ seek? 'Fruit.' And what is fruit in contradistinction to leaves? Character and conduct like His. That is our fruit. All else is leafage. As the Apostle says, 'Love, joy, hope, peace, righteousness in the Holy Ghost'; or, to put it into one word, Christ-likeness in our inmost heart and nature, and Christ-likeness, so far as it may be possible for us, in our daily life, that is the one thing that our Lord seeks from us.

O brethren! we do not realise enough for ourselves, day by day, that it was for this end that Jesus Christ came. The cradle in Bethlehem, the weary life, the gracious words, the mighty deeds, the Cross on Calvary, the open grave, Olivet with His last foot-prints; His place on the throne, Pentecost, they were all meant for this, to make you and me good men, righteous people, bearing the fruits of holy living and conduct corresponding to His own pattern. Emotions of the selectest kind, religious experience of the profoundest and truest nature, these are blessed and good. They are the blossom which sets into fruit. And they

come for this end, that by the help of them we may be made like Jesus Christ. He has yet to learn what is the purpose and the meaning of the Gospel who fixes upon anything else as its ultimate design than the production in us, as the results of the life of Christ dwelling in our hearts, of character and conduct like to His.

I suppose I ought to apologise for talking such commonplace platitudes as these, but, brethren, the most commonplace truths are usually the most important and the most impotent. And no 'platitude' is a platitude until you have brought it so completely into your lives that there is no room for a fuller working of it out. So I come to you, Christian men and women, real and nominal, now with this for my message, that Jesus Christ seeks from you this first and foremost, that you shall be good men and women 'according to the pattern that has been showed us in the Mount,' according to the likeness of His own stainless perfection.

And do not forget that Jesus Christ hungers for that goodness. That is a strange, and infinitely touching, and absolutely true thing. He is only 'satisfied,' and the hunger of His heart appeased, when 'He sees of the travail of His soul' in the righteousness of His servants. I passed a day or two ago, in a country place, a great field on which there was stuck up a board that said, '—'s trial ground for seeds.' This world is *Christ's* trial ground for seeds, where He is testing you and me to see whether it is worth while cultivating us any more, and whether we can bring forth any 'fruit to perfection' fit for the lips and the refreshment of the Owner and Lord of the vineyard. Christ longs for fruit from us. And—strange and

wonderful, and yet true—the ‘bread’ that He eats is the service of His servants. That, amongst other things, is what is meant by the ancient institution of sacrifice, ‘the food of the gods.’ Christ’s food is the holiness and obedience of His children. He comes to us, as He came to that fig-tree, seeking from *us* this fruit which He delights in receiving. Brethren, we cannot think too much of Christ’s unspeakable gift in itself and in its consequences; but we may easily think too little, and I am sure that a great many of us do think too little, of Christ’s demands. He is not an austere man, ‘reaping where He did not sow’; but having sowed so much, He does look for the harvest. He comes to us with the heart-moving appeal, ‘I have given all to thee; what givest thou to Me?’ ‘My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill; and he fenced it and planted it, and built a tower and a wine-press in it’—and what then?—‘and he looked that it should bring forth grapes.’ Christ comes to each of you professing Christians, and asks, ‘What fruit hast thou borne after all My sedulous husbandry?’

II. Now note, in the next place, what Christ found.

‘Nothing but leaves.’ I have already said that we are told that the habit of growth of these trees is that the fruit accompanies, and sometimes precedes, the leaves. Whether it is so or no, let me remind you that leaves are an outcome of the life as well as fruit, and that they benefit the tree, and assist in the production of the fruit which it ought to bear. And so the symbol suggests things that are good in themselves, ancillary and subsidiary to the production of fruit, but which sometimes tend to such dispro-

portionate exuberance of growth as that all the life of the tree runs to leaf, and there is not a berry to be found on it.

And if you want to know what such things are, remember the condition of the rulers of Israel at that time. They prided themselves upon their nominal, external, hereditary connection with a system of revelation, they trusted in mere ritualisms, they had ossified religion into theology, and degraded morality into casuistry. They thought that because they had been born Jews, and circumcised, and because there was a daily sacrifice going on in the Temple, and because they had Rabbis who could split hairs *ad infinitum*, therefore they were the 'temple of the Lord,' and God's chosen.

And that is exactly what hosts of pagans, masquerading as Christians, are doing in all our so-called Christian lands, and in all our so-called Christian congregations. In any community of so-called Christian people there is a little nucleus of real, earnest, God-fearing folk, and a great fringe of people whose Christianity is mostly from the teeth outward, who have a nominal and external connection with religion, who have been 'baptized' and are 'communicants,' who think that religion lies mainly in coming on a Sunday, and with more or less toleration and interest listening to a preacher's words and joining in external worship, and all the while the 'weightier matters of the law'—righteousness, justice, and the love of God—they leave untouched. What describes such a type of religion with more piercing accuracy than 'nothing but leaves'?

External connection with God's Church is a good thing. It is meant to make us better men and women.

If it does not, it is a bad thing. Acts of worship, more or less elaborate—for it is not the elaboration of ceremonial, but the mistaken view of it, that does the harm—acts of worship may be helpful, or may be absolute barriers to real religious life. They are becoming so largely to-day. The drift and trend of opinion in some parts of so-called Christendom is in the direction of outward ceremonial. And I, for one, believe that there are few things doing more harm to the Christian character of England to-day than the preposterous recurrence to a reliance on the mere externals of worship. Of course we Dissenters pride ourselves on having no complicity with the sacramentarian errors which underlie these. But there may be quite as much of a barrier between the soul and Christ, reared by the bare worship of Nonconformists, or by the no-worship of the Society of Friends. If the absence of form be converted into a form, as it often is, there may be as lofty and wide a barrier raised by these as by the most elaborate ritual of the highest ceremonial that exists in Christendom. And so I say to you, dear brethren, seeing that we are all in danger of cleaving to externals and substituting these which are intended to be helps to the production of godly life and character, it becomes us all to listen to the solemn word of exhortation that comes out of my text, and to beware lest our religion runs to leaf instead of setting into fruit.

It does so with many of us; that is a certainty. I am thinking about no individual, about no individuals, but I am only speaking common sense when I say that amongst as many people as I am now addressing there will be an appreciable proportion who have no notion of religion as anything beyond

a more or less imperative and more or less unwelcome set of external observances.

III. And so, lastly, let me ask you to notice what Christ did.

I do not need to trouble myself nor you with vindicating the morality of this miracle against the fantastic objections that often have been made against it; nor need I say a word more than I have already said about its symbolical meaning. Israel was in that week being asked for the last time to 'bring forth fruit' to the Lord of the vineyard. The refusal bound barrenness on the synagogue and on the nation, if not absolutely for ever, at all events until 'it shall turn to the Lord,' and partake again of 'the root and fatness' from which it has been broken off. What thirsty lips since that week have ever got any good out of Rabbinism and Judaism? No 'figs' have grown on that 'thistle.' The world has passed it by, and left all its subtle casuistries and painfully microscopic studies of the letter of Scripture—with utter oblivion of its spirit—left them all severely and wisely alone. Judaism is a dead tree.

And is there nothing else in this incident? 'No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever'; the punishment of that fruitlessness was confirmed and eternal barrenness. *There* is the lesson that the punishment of any sin is to bind the sin upon the doer of it.

But, further, the church or the individual whose religion runs to leaf is useless to the world. What does the world care about the ceremonials and the externals of worship, and a painful orthodoxy, and the study of the letter of Scripture? Nothing. A useless church or a Christian, from whom no man gets any fruit to cool a thirsty, parched lip, is only fit for what

comes after the barrenness, and that is, that every tree that bringeth 'not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.' The churches of England, and we, as integral parts of these, have solemn duties lying upon us to-day; and if we cannot help our brethren, and feed and nourish the hungry and thirsty hearts and souls of mankind, then—then! the sooner we are plucked up and pitched over the vineyard wall, which is the fate of the barren vine, the better for the world and the better for the vineyard.

The fate of Judaism teaches, to all of us professing Christians, very solemn lessons. 'If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee.' What has become of the seven churches of Asia Minor? They hardened into chattering theological 'orthodoxy,' and all the blood of them went to the surface, so to speak. And so down came the Mohammedan power—which was strong then because it did believe in a God, and not in its own belief about a God—and wiped them off the face of the earth. And so, brethren, we have, in this miracle, a warning and a prophecy which it becomes all the Christian communities of this day, and the individual members of such, to lay very earnestly to heart.

But do not let us forget that the Evangelist who does not tell us the story of the blasted fig-tree does tell us its analogue, the parable of the barren fig-tree, and that in it we read that when the fiat of destruction had gone forth, there was one who said, 'Let it alone this year also that I may dig about it, . . . and if it bear fruit, well! If not, after that thou shalt cut it down.' So the barren tree may become a fruitful tree, though it has hitherto borne nothing but leaves. Your religion may have been all on the surface and in form, but you

can come into touch with Him in whom is our life and from whom comes our fruitfulness. He has said to each of us, 'As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.'



## DISHONEST TENANTS

'And He' began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. 2. And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. 3. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. 4. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled. 5. And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some. 6. Having yet therefore one son, his well beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son. 7. But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. 8. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. 9. What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others. 10. And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: 11. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? 12. And they sought to lay hold on Him, but feared the people: for they knew that He had spoken the parable against them: and they left Him, and went their way.—MARK xii. 1-12.

THE ecclesiastical rulers had just been questioning Jesus as to the authority by which He acted. His answer, a counter-question as to John's authority, was not an evasion. If they decided whence John came, they would not be at any loss as to whence Jesus came. If they steeled themselves against acknowledging the Forerunner, they would not be receptive of Christ's message. That keen-edged retort plainly indicates Christ's conviction of the rulers' insincerity, and in this parable He charges home on these solemn hypocrites their share in the hereditary rejection of messengers whose authority was unquestionable. Much they cared for even divine authority, as they and their predecessors had shown through centuries! The veil of parable is transparent here. Jesus increased in severity and bold attack as the end drew near.

I. The parable begins with a tender description of the preparation and allotment of the vineyard. The

picture is based upon Isaiah's lovely apologue (Isaiah v. 1), which was, no doubt, familiar to the learned officials. But there is a slight difference in the application of the metaphor which in Isaiah means the nation, and in the parable is rather the theocracy as an institution, or, as we may put it roughly, the aggregate of divine revelations and appointments which constituted the religious prerogatives of Israel.

Our Lord follows the original passage in the description of the preparation of the vineyard, but it would probably be going too far to press special meanings on the wall, the wine-press, and the watchman's tower. The fence was to keep off marauders, whether passers-by or 'the boar out of the wood' (Psalm lxxx. 12, 13); the wine-press, for which Mark uses the word which means rather the vat into which the juice from the press proper flowed, was to extract and collect the precious liquid; the tower was for the watchman.

A vineyard with all these fittings was ready for profitable occupation. Thus abundantly had God furnished Israel with all that was needed for fruitful, happy service. What was true of the ancient Church is still more true of us who have received every requisite for holy living. Isaiah's solemn appeal has a still sharper edge for Christians: 'Judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?'

The 'letting of the vineyard to husbandmen' means the committal to Israel and its rulers of these divine institutions, and the holding them responsible for their fruitfulness. It may be a question whether the tenants are to be understood as only the official persons, or whether, while these are primarily addressed, they represent the whole people. The usual interpretation

limits the meaning to the rulers, but, if so, it is difficult to carry out the application, as the vineyard would then have to be regarded as being the nation, which confuses all. The language of Matthew (which threatens the taking of the vineyard and giving it to another nation) obliges us to regard the nation as included in the husbandmen, though primarily the expression is addressed to the rulers.

But more important is it to note the strong expressions for man's quasi-independence and responsibility. The Jew was invested with full possession of the vineyard. We all, in like manner, have intrusted to us, to do as we will with, the various gifts and powers of Christ's gospel. God, as it were, draws somewhat apart from man, that he may have free play for his choice, and bear the burden of responsibility. The divine action was conspicuous at the time of founding the polity of Judaism, and then came long years in which there were no miracles, but all things continued as they were. God was as near as before, but He seemed far off. Thus Jesus has, in like manner, gone 'into a far country to receive a kingdom and to return'; and we, the tenants of a richer vineyard than Israel's, have to administer what He has intrusted to us, and to bring near by faith Him who is to sense far off.

II. The next scenes paint the conduct of the dishonest vine-dressers. We mark the stern, dark picture drawn of the continued and brutal violence, as well as the flagrant unfaithfulness, of the tenants. Matthew's version gives emphasis to the increasing harshness of treatment of the owner's messengers, as does Mark's. First comes beating, then wounding, then murder. The interpretation is self-evident. The 'servants' are the prophets, mostly men inferior in rank to the hierarchy,

shepherds, fig-gatherers, and the like. They came to rouse Israel to a sense of the purpose for which they had received their distinguishing prerogatives, and their reward had been contempt and maltreatment. They 'had trial of mockings and scourgings, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were slain with the sword.'

The indictment is the same as that by which Stephen wrought the Sanhedrim into a paroxysm of fury. To make such a charge as Jesus did, in the very Temple courts, and with the already hostile priests glaring at Him while He spoke, was a deliberate assault on them and their predecessors, whose true successors they showed themselves to be. They had just been solemnly questioning Him as to His authority. He answers by thus passing in review the uniform treatment meted by them and their like to those who came with God's manifest authority.

If a mere man had spoken this parable, we might admire the magnificent audacity of such an accusation. But the Speaker is more than man, and we have to recognise the judicial calmness and severity of His tone. Israel's history, as it shaped itself before His 'pure eyes and perfect judgment,' was one long series of divine favours and of human ingratitude, of ample preparations for righteous living and of no result, of messengers sent and their contumelious rejection. We wonder at the sad monotony of such requital. Are we doing otherwise?

III. Then comes the last effort of the Owner, the last arrow in the quiver of Almighty Love. Two things are to be pondered in this part of the parable. First, that wonderful glimpse into the depths of God's heart, in the hope expressed by the Owner of the vineyard,

brings out very clearly Christ's claim, made there before all these hostile, keen critics, to stand in an altogether singular relation to God. He asserts His Sonship as separating Him from the class of prophets who are servants only, and as constituting a relationship with the Father prior to His coming to earth. His Sonship is no mere synonym for His Messiahship, but was a fact long before Bethlehem; and its assertion lifts for us a corner of the veil of cloud and darkness round the throne of God. Not less striking is the expression of a frustrated hope in 'they will reverence My Son.' Men can thwart God's purpose. His divine charity 'hopeth all things.' The mystery thus sharply put here is but that which is presented everywhere in the co-existence of God's purposes and man's freedom.

The other noteworthy point is the corresponding casting of the vine-dressers' thoughts into words. Both representations are due to the graphic character of parable; both crystallise into speech motives which were not actually spoken. It is unnecessary to suppose that even the rulers of Israel had gone the awful length of clear recognition of Christ's Messiahship, and of looking each other in the face and whispering such a fiendish resolve. Jesus is here dragging to light unconscious motives. The masses did wish to have their national privileges and to avoid their national duties. The rulers did wish to have their sway over minds and consciences undisturbed. They did resent Jesus' interference, chiefly because they instinctively felt that it threatened their position. They wanted to get Him out of the way, that they might lord it at will. They could have known that He was the Son, and they suppressed dawning suspicions that He was. Alas! they have descendants still in many of

us who put away His claims, even while we secretly recognise them, in order that we may do as we like without His meddling with us!

The rulers' calculation was a blunder. As Augustine says, 'They slew Him that they might possess, and, because they slew, they lost.' So is it always. Whoever tries to secure any desired end by putting away his responsibility to render to God the fruit of his thankful service, loses the good which he would fain clutch at for his own. All sin is a mistake.

The parable passes from thinly veiled history to equally transparent prediction. How sadly and how unshrinkingly does the meek yet mighty Victim disclose to the conspirators His perfect knowledge of the murder which they were even now hatching in their minds! He foresees all, and will not lift a finger to prevent it. Mark puts the 'killing' before the 'casting out of the vineyard,' while Matthew and Luke invert the order of the two things. The slaughtered corpse was, as a further indignity, thrown over the wall, by which is symbolically expressed His exclusion from Israel, and the vine-dressers' delusion that they now had secured undisturbed possession.

IV. The last point is the authoritative sentence on the evil-doers. Mark's condensed account makes Christ Himself answer His own question. Probably we are to suppose that, with hypocritical readiness, some of the rulers replied, as the other Evangelists represent, and that Jesus then solemnly took up their words. If anything could have enraged the rulers more than the parable itself, the distinct declaration of the transference of Israel's prerogatives to more worthy tenants would do so. The words are heavy with doom. They carry a lesson for us. Stewardship implies responsi-

bility, and faithlessness, sooner or later, involves deprivation. The only way to keep God's gifts is to use them for His glory. 'The grace of God,' says Luther somewhere, 'is like a flying summer shower.' Where are Ephesus and the other apocalyptic churches? Let us 'take heed lest, if God spared not the natural branches, He also spare not us.'

Jesus leaves the hearers with the old psalm ringing in their ears, which proclaimed that 'the stone which the builders rejected becomes the head stone of the corner.' Other words of the same psalm had been chanted by the crowd in the procession on entering the city. Their fervour was cooling, but the prophecy would still be fulfilled. The builders are the same as the vine-dressers; their rejection of the stone is parallel with slaying the Son.

But though Jesus foretells His death, He also foretells His triumph after death. How could He have spoken, almost in one breath, the prophecy of His being slain and 'cast out of the vineyard,' and that of His being exalted to be the very apex and shining summit of the true Temple, unless He had been conscious that His death was indeed not the end, but the centre, of His work, and His elevation to universal and unchanging dominion?

## GOD'S LAST ARROW

‘Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them.’—MARK xii. 6.

REFERENCE to Isaiah v. There are differences in detail here which need not trouble us.

Isaiah’s parable is a review of the theocratic history of Israel, and clearly the messengers are the prophets; here Christ speaks of Himself and His own mission to Israel, and goes on to tell of His death as already accomplished.

I. The Son who follows and surpasses the servants.

(a) Our Lord here places Himself in the line of the prophets as coming for a similar purpose. The mission to *Israel* was the same. The mission of *His life* was the same.

The last words of the lawgiver certainly point to a person (Deut. xviii. 18): ‘A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you like unto me. Him shall ye hear.’ How ridiculous the cool superciliousness with which modern historicial criticism ‘pooh-poohs’ that interpretation! But the contrast is quite as prominent as the resemblance. This saying is one which occurs in all the Synoptics, and is as full a declaration of Sonship as any in John’s Gospel. It reposes on the scene at the baptism (Matt. iii.): ‘This is My beloved Son!’ Such a saying was well enough understood by the Jews to mean more than the ‘Messiah.’ It clearly involves kindred to the divine in a far other and higher sense than any prophet ever had it. It involves pre-existence. It asserts that He was the special object of the divine love, the ‘heir.’

You cannot relieve the New Testament Christ of



the responsibility of having made such assertions. There they are! He did deliberately declare that He was, in a unique sense, '*the Son*' on whom the love and complacency of the Father rested continually.

II. The aggravation of men's sins as tending to the enhancement of the divine efforts.

The terrible Nemesis of evil is that it ever tends to reproduce itself in aggravated forms. Think of the influence of habit; the searing of conscience, so that we become able to do things that we would have shrunk from at an earlier stage. Remember how impunity leads to greater sin. So here the first servant is merely sent away empty, the second is wounded and disgraced, the third is killed. All evil is an inclined plane, a steady, downward progress. How beautifully the opposite principle of the divine love and patience is represented as striving with the increasing hate and resistance! According to Matthew, the householder sent other servants '*more than the first,*' and the climax was that he sent his son. Mightier forces are brought to bear. This attraction *increases* as the square of the distance. The blacker the cloud, the brighter the sun; the thicker the ice, the hotter the flame; the harder the soil, the stronger the ploughshare. Note, too, the undertone of sacrifice and of yearning for the son which may be discerned in the 'householder's' words. The son is his '*dearest treasure,*' his mightiest gift, than which is nothing higher.

The mission of Christ is the ultimate appeal of God to men.

In the primary sense of the parable Jesus does close the history of the divine strivings with Israel. After Christ, the last of the prophets, the divine voice ceases; after the blaze of that light all is dark. There is

nothing more remarkable in the whole history of the world than that cessation in an instant, as it were, of the long, august series of divine efforts for Israel. Henceforward there is an awful silence. 'Forsaken Israel wanders lone.'

And the principle involved for us is the same.

'Christ crucified' is more than Christ miracle-working. That 'more' we have, as the Jews had. But if that avails not, then nothing else will.

He is 'last' because highest, strongest, and all-sufficient.

He is 'last' inasmuch as all since are but echoes of His voice and proclaimers of His grace.

He is 'last' as the eternal and the permanent, the 'same for ever' (Heb. xiii. 8). There are to be no new powers for the world; no new forces to draw men to God. God's quiver is empty, His last bolt shot, His most tender appeal made.

### III. The unwearied divine charity.

'They will reverence My Son.' May we not say this is a divine hope? It is not worth while to make a difficulty of the bold representation. It is but parallel to all the dealings of God with men; and it sets forth the possibility that He *might* have won Israel back to God and to obedience. It suggests the good faith and the earnestness with which God sent Him, and He came, to bring Israel back to God. But we are not to suppose that this divine hope excluded the divine purpose of His death or was inconsistent with that, for He goes on to speak of His death as if it were past (verse 8). This shows how distinctly He foreknew it.

Its highest aspect is not here, for it was not needed for the parable. 'With wicked hands ye have crucified,' etc., is true, as well as 'I lay it down of Myself.'

Let us lay to heart the solemn love which warns by prophesying, tells what men are going to do in order that they may *not* do it (and what He will do in order that He may *not* have to do it). And let us yield ourselves to the power of Christ's death as God's magnet for drawing us all back to Him; and as certain to bring about at last the satisfaction of the Father's long-frustrated hope: 'They will reverence my Son,' and the fulfilment of the Son's long-unaccomplished prediction: 'I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.'

## NOT FAR AND NOT IN

'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.'—MARK xii. 34.

'A BRUISED reed He will not break, and the smoking flax He will not quench.'

Here is Christ's recognition of the low beginnings of goodness and faith.

This is a special case of a man who appears to have fully discerned the spirituality and inwardness of law, and to have felt that the one bond between God and man was love. He needed only to have followed out the former thought to have been smitten by the conviction of his own sinfulness, and to have reflected on the latter to have discovered that he needed some one who could certify and commend God's love to him, and thereby to kindle his to God. Christ recognises such beginnings and encourages him to persevere: but warns him against the danger of supposing himself in the kingdom, and against the prolongation of what is only good as a transition state.

This Scribe is an interesting study as being one who recognised the Law in its spiritual meaning, in opposition to forms and ceremonies. His intellectual convictions needed to be led on from recognition of the spirituality of the Law to recognition of his own failures. 'By law is the knowledge of sin.' His intellectual convictions needed to pass over into and influence his heart and life. He recognised true piety, and was earnestly striving after it, but entrance into the kingdom is by faith in the Saviour, who is 'the Way.' So Jesus' praise of him is but measured. For in him there was separation between knowing and doing.

### I. Who are near?

Christ's kingdom is near us all, whether we are heathen, infidel, profligate or not.

Here is a distinct recognition of two things—(a) Degrees of approximation; (b) decisive separation between those who are, and those who are not, within the kingdom.

This Scribe was near, and yet not in, the kingdom, because, like so many in all ages, he had an intellectual hold of principles which he had never followed out to their intellectual issues, nor ever enthroned as, in their practical issues, the guides of his life. How constantly we find characters of similar incompleteness among ourselves!

How many of us have true thoughts concerning God's law and what it requires, which ought, in all reason, to have brought us to the consciousness of our own sin, and are yet untouched by one pang of penitence! How many of us have lying in our heads, like disused furniture in a lumber-room, what we suppose to be beliefs of ours, which only need to be followed out to their necessary results to refurnish with a new equipment the whole of our religious thinking! How few of us do really take pains to bring our beliefs into clear sunlight, and to follow them wherever they lead us! There is no commoner fault, and no greater foe, than the hazy, lazy half-belief, of which its owner neither knows the grounds nor perceives the intellectual or the practical issues.

There are multitudes who have, or have had, convictions of which the only rational outcome is practical surrender to Jesus Christ by faith and love. Such persons abound in Christian congregations and in Christian homes. They are on the verge of 'the great

surrender,' but they do not go beyond the verge, and so they perpetrate 'the great refusal.' And to all such the word of our text should sound as a warning note, which has also hope in its tone. 'Not far from' is still 'outside.'

## II. Why they are only near.

The reason is not because of anything apart from themselves. The Christian gospel offers immediate entrance into the Kingdom, and all the gifts which its King can bestow, to all and every one who will. So that the sole cause of any man's non-entrance lies with himself.

We have spoken of failure to follow out truths partially grasped, and that constitutes a reason which affects the intellect mainly, and plays its part in keeping men out of the Kingdom.

But there are other, perhaps more common, reasons, which intervene to prevent convictions being followed out into their properly consequent acts.

The two most familiar and fatal of these are:—

(a) Procrastination.

(b) Lingering love of the world.

## III. Such men cannot continue near.

The state is necessarily transitional. It must pass over into—(a) Either going on and into the Kingdom, or (b) going further away from it.

Christ warns here, and would stimulate to action, for—(a) Convictions not acted on die; (b) truths not followed out fade; (c) impressions resisted are harder to be made again; (d) obstacles increase with time; (e) the habit of lingering becomes strengthened.

## IV. Unless you are in, you are finally shut out.

'City of refuge.' It was of no avail to have been near. 'Strive to enter in.'

Appeal to all such as are in this transition stage.

## THE CREDULITY OF UNBELIEF

'Many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many.'—**MARK** xiii. 6.

'When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?'—**LUKE** xviii. 8.

It was the same generation that is represented in these two texts as void of faith in the Son of Man, and as credulously giving heed to impostors. Unbelief and superstition are closely allied. Religion is so vital a necessity, that if the true form of it be cast aside, some false form will be eagerly seized in order to fill the aching void. Men cannot permanently live without some sort of a faith in the Unseen, but they can determine whether it shall be a worthy recognition of a worthy conception of that Unseen, or a debasing superstition. An epoch of materialism in philosophic thought has always been followed by violent reaction, in which quacks and fanatics have reaped rich harvests. If the dark is not peopled with one loved Face, our busy imagination will fill it with a crowd of horrible ones.

Just as a sailor, looking out into the night over a solitary, islandless sea, sees shapes; intolerant of the islandless expanse, makes land out of fogbanks; and, sick of silence, hears 'airy tongues' in the moanings of the wind and the slow roll of the waves, so men shudderingly look into the dark unknown, and if they see not their Father there, will either shut their eyes or strain them in gazing it into shape. The sight of Him is religion, the closed eye is infidelity, the strained gaze is superstition. The second and the third are each so unsatisfying that they perpetually pass over into one another and destroy one another,

as when I shut my eyes, I see slowly shaping itself a coloured image of my eye, which soon flickers and fluctuates into black nothingness again, and then rises once more, once more to fade. Men, if they believe not in God, then do service to 'them which by nature are no gods.'

But let us come to more immediately Christian thoughts. Christ does what men so urgently require to be done, that if they do not believe in Him they will be forced to shape out for themselves some fancied ways of doing it. The emotions which men cherish towards Him so irrepressibly need an object to rest on, that if not He, then some far less worthy one, will be chosen to receive them.

It is just to the illustration of these thoughts that I seek to turn now, and in such alternatives as these—

I. Reception of Christ as the Revealer is the only escape from unmanly submission to unworthy pretenders.

That function is one which the instincts of men teach them that they need.

Christ comes to satisfy the need as the visible true embodiment of the Father's love, of the Father's wisdom.

If He be rejected—what then? Why, not that the men who reject will contentedly continue in darkness—that is never possible; but that some manner or other of satisfying the clamant need will be had recourse to, and then that to it will be transferred the submission and credence that should have been His. If we have Him for our Teacher and Guide, then all other teachers and guides will take their right places. We shall not angrily repel their power, nor talk loudly about 'the right of private judgment,' and our independence of all men's thoughts. We are not so



independent. We shall thankfully accept all help from all men wiser, better, more manly than ourselves, whether they give us uttered words of wisdom and beauty, having 'grace poured into their lips,' or whether they give us lives ennobled by strenuous effort, or whether they give us greater treasure than all these—the sight once more of a loving heart. All is good, all is helpful, all we shall receive; but in proportion to the felt obligations we are laid under to them will be the felt authority of that saying, 'Call no man your master on earth, for One is your Master, even Christ.' That command forbids our slavishly accepting any human domination over our faith, but it no less emphatically forbids our contemptuously rejecting any human helper of our joy, for it closes with 'and all ye are brethren'—bound then to mutual observance, mutual helpfulness, mutual respect for each other's individuality, mutual avoidance of needless division. To have Him for his Guide makes the human guide gentle and tender among his disciples 'as a nurse among her children,' for he remembers 'the gentleness of Christ,' and he dare not be other than an imitator of Him. A Christian teacher's spirit will always be, 'not for that we have dominion over your faith, but we are helpers of your joy'; his most earnest word, 'I beseech you, therefore, brethren'; his constant desire, 'He must increase. I must decrease.' And to have Christ for our Guide makes the taught lovingly submissive to all who by largeness of gifts and graces are set by Him above them, and yet lovingly recalcitrant at any attempt to compel adhesion or force dogmas. The one freedom from undue dependence on men and men's opinions lies in this submission to Jesus. Then we can say, when need is,

‘I have a Master. To Him I submit; if *you* seek to be master, I demur: of them who seemed to be somewhat, whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me.’

But the greatest danger is not that our guides shall insist on our submission, but that we shall insist on giving it. It is for all of us such a burden to have the management of our own fate, the forming of our own opinions, the fearful responsibility of our own destiny, that we are all only too ready to say to some man or other, from love or from laziness, ‘Where thou goest, I will go; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.’

Few things are more strange and tragic than the eagerness with which people who are a great deal too enlightened to render allegiance to Jesus Christ will instal some teacher of their own choosing as their authoritative master, will swallow his dicta, swear by him, and glory in being called by his name. What they think it derogatory to their mental independence to give to the Teacher of Nazareth, they freely give to their chosen oracle. It is not in ‘the last times’ only that men who will not endure sound teaching ‘heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts,’ and have ‘the ears’ which are fast closed to ‘the Truth’ wide open ‘to fables.’

On the small scale we see this melancholy perversity of conduct exemplified in every little coterie and school of unbelievers.

On the great scale Mohammedanism and Buddhism, with their millions of adherents, write the same tragic truth large in the history of the world.

II. Faith in the reconciling Christ is the only sure deliverance from debasing reliance on false means of reconciliation.

In a very profound sense ignorance and sin are the same fact regarded under two different aspects. And in the depths of their natures men have the longing for some Power who shall put away sin, as they have the longing for one that will dispel ignorance. The consciousness of alienation from God lies in the human heart, dormant indeed for the most part, but like a coiled, hibernating snake, ready to wake and strike its poison into the veins. Christ by His great work, and specially by His sacrificial death, meets that universal need.

But closely as His work fits men's needs, it sharply opposes some of their wishes, and of their interpretations of their needs. The Jew 'demands a sign,' the Greek craves a reasoned system of 'wisdom,' and both concur in finding the Cross an 'offence.'

But the rejection of Jesus as the Reconciler does not quiet the cravings, which make themselves heard at some time or other in most consciences, for deliverance from the dominion and from the guilt of sin. And men are driven to adopt other expedients to fill up the void which their turning away from Jesus has left. Sometimes they fall back on a vague reliance on a vague assertion that 'God is merciful'; sometimes they reason themselves into a belief—or, at any rate, an assertion—that the conception of sin is an error, and that men are not guilty. Sometimes they manage to silence the inward voice that accuses and condemns, by dint of not listening to it or drowning it by other noises.

But these expedients fail them some time or other, and then, if they have not cast the burden of their sin and their sins on the great Reconciler, they either have to weary themselves with painful and vain efforts to

be their own redeemers, or they fall under the domination of a priest.

Hence the hideous penances of heathenism ; and hence, too, the power of sacramentarian and sacerdotal perversions of evangelical truth.

III. Faith in Christ as the Regenerator is the only deliverance from baseless hopes for the world.

The world is to-day full of moaning voices crying, 'Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?' and it is full of confident voices proclaiming other means of its regeneration than letting Christ 'make all things new.'

The conviction that society needs to be reconstituted on other principles is spread everywhere, and is often associated with intense disbelief in Christ the Regenerator.

Has not the past proved that all schemes for the regeneration of society which do not grapple with the fact of sin, and which do not provide a means of infusing into human nature a new impulse and direction, will end in failure, and are only too likely to end in blood? These two requirements are met by Jesus, and by Him only, and whoever rejects Him and His gift of pardon and cleansing, and His inbreathing of a new life into the individual, will fail in his effort, however earnest and noble in many aspects, to redeem society and bring about a fair new world.

It is pitiable to see the waste of high aspiration and eager effort in so many quarters to-day. But that waste is sure to attend every scheme which does not start from the recognition of Christ's work as the basis of the world's transformation, and does not crown Him as the King, because He is the Saviour, of mankind.

## AUTHORITY AND WORK

'For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.'—MARK xiii. 34.

CHURCH order is not directly touched on in the Gospels, but the principles which underlie all Church order are distinctly laid down. The whole community of Christian people is a family or household, being brethren because possessors of a new life through Christ. In that household there is one 'Master,' and all its members are 'servants.' That name suggests the purpose for which they exist; the meaning of all their offices, dignities, etc.

I. The authority with which the servants are invested.

We hear a great deal about the authority of the Church in these days, as a determiner of truth and as a prescriber of Christian action. It means generally official authority, the power of guidance and definition of the Church's action, etc., which some people think is lodged in the hands of preachers, pastors, priests, either individually or collectively. There is nothing of that sort meant here. Whatever this authority is, it belongs to the whole body of the servants, not to individuals among them. It is the prerogative of the whole *ecclesia*, not of some handful of them. 'This honour,' whatever it be, 'have all the saints.'

Explain by reference to 'the kings of the earth exercise lordship over them'; 'the greatest shall be your servant.' It is then but another name for capacity for service, power to bless, etc.

And this idea is still further borne out if we go back

to the parable of our text. A man leaves his house in charge of his servants. To them is committed the responsibility for his goods. His honour and interests are in their hands. They have control over his possessions. This is the analogy which our Lord suggests as presenting a vivid likeness to our position in the world.

Christ has committed the care of His kingdom, the glory of His name, the growth of His cause in the world to His Church, and has endowed it with all 'talents,' *i.e.* gifts needful for that work. Or, to put it in other words, they are His representatives in the world. They have to defend His honour. His name is scandalised or glorified by their actions. They have to see to His interests. They are charged with the carrying out of His mind and purposes.

The foundation of all is laid. Henceforth building on it is all, and that is to be done by men. Human lips and Christian effort—not without the divine Spirit in the word—are to be the means.

It is as when some commander plans his battle, and from an eminence overlooks the current of the fight, and marks the plunging legions as they struggle through the smoke. He holds all the tremendous machinery in his hands. The plan and the glory are his, but the execution of the plan lies with the troops.

In a still more true sense all the glory of the Christian conquest of the world is His, but still the instruments are ourselves. The whole counsel of God is on our side. We 'go not a warfare at our own charges.' Note the perfect consistency of this with all that we hold of the necessity of divine influence, etc.

His servants are intrusted with all His 'goods.' They have authority over the gifts which He has

given them, *i.e.* Christian men are stewards of Christ's riches for others.

They have access to the free use of them all for themselves.

Thus the 'authority' is all derived. It is all given for the sake of others. It is all capacity for service. Hence—

II. The authority with which the servants are invested binds every one of them to hard work for Christ.

'To every man his work.'

(1) Gifts involve duties. That is the first great thought. To have received binds us to impart. 'Freely ye have received, freely give.'

All selfish possession of the gifts which Christ bestows is grave sin.

The price at which they were procured, that miracle and mystery of self-sacrifice, is the great pattern as well as the great motive for our service.

The purpose for which we have received them is plainly set forth: in the existence of the solidarity in which we are all bound; in the definite utterances of Scripture.

The need for their exercise is only too palpable in the condition of things around us.

(2) In this multitude of servants every one has his own task.

The universality of the great gift leads to a corresponding universality of obligation. All Christians have their gifts. Each of us has his special work marked out for him by character, relationships, circumstances, natural tastes, etc.

How solemn a divine call there is in these individual peculiarities which we so often think of as unimportant

accidents, or regard mainly in their bearing on our own ease and comfort! How reverently we should regard the diversities which are thus revelations of God's will concerning our tasks! How earnestly we should seek to know what it is that we are fitted for!

The importance of all protests against priestly assumption lies here, that they strengthen the force with which we proclaim that every man has his 'work.'

Ponder the variety of characters and gifts which Christ gives and desires His servants to use, and the indispensable need for them all. The ideal Church is the 'body' of Christ, in which each member has its place and function.

Our fault in this matter.

(3) The duties are to be done in the spirit of hard toil.

The servant has 'his work' allotted him, and the word implies that the work calls for effort. The race is not to be run without dust and sweat. Our Christian service is not to be regarded as a 'bye-product' or *parergon*. It is, so to speak, a *vocation*, not an *avocation*. It deserves and demands all the energy that we can put forth, continuity and constancy, plan and system. Nothing is to be done for God, any more than for ourselves, without toil. 'In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread and give it to others.'

III. To do this work, watchfulness is needed.

The division of tasks between 'servant' and 'porter' is only part of the drapery of the parable. To show that watchfulness belongs to all, see the two following verses.

What is this watchfulness?

Not constant fidgety curiosity about the coming of the Lord; not hunting after apocalyptic dates. The



modern impression seems to be that such study is 'watchfulness.' Christ says that the time of His coming is hidden (see previous verses). Ignorance of that is the very reason why we are to watch. Watchfulness, then, is just a profound and constant feeling of the transiency of this present. The mind is to be kept detached from it; the eye and heart are to be going out to things 'unseen and eternal'; we are to be familiarising ourselves with the thought that the world is passing away.

This watchfulness is an indispensable part of our 'work.' The true Christian thought of the transiency of the world sets us to work the more vigorously in it, and increases, not diminishes, our sense of the importance of time and of earthly things, and braces us to our tasks by the thought of the brevity of opportunity, as well as by guarding us against tastes and habits which eat all earnestness out of the soul.

Thus 'working and watching,' happy will be the servant whom his Lord will find 'so doing,' *i.e.* at work, not idly looking for Him. Our common duties are the best preparation for our Lord's coming.

## THE ALABASTER BOX

'And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on Me. . . . 8. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint My body to the burying. 9. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.'—MARK xiv. 6-9.

JOHN'S Gospel sets this incident in its due framework of time and place, and tells us the names of the actors. The time was within a week of Calvary, the place was Bethany, where, as John significantly reminds us, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, thereby connecting the feast with that incident; the woman who broke the box of ointment and poured the perfume on the head and feet of Jesus was Mary; the first critic of her action was Judas. Selfishness blames love for the profusion and prodigality, which to it seem folly and waste. The disciples chimed in with the objection, not because they were superior to Mary in wisdom, but because they were inferior in consecration.

John tells us, too, that Martha was 'amongst them that served.' The characteristics of the two sisters are preserved. The two types of character which they respectively represent have great difficulty in understanding and doing justice to one another. Christ understands and does justice to them both. Martha, bustling, practical, utilitarian to the finger-tips, does not much care about listening to Christ's words of wisdom. She has not any very high-strung or finely-spun emotions, but she can busy herself in getting a meal ready; she loves Him with all her heart, and she takes her own way of showing it. But she gets impatient with her sister, and thinks that her sitting at

Christ's feet is a dreamy waste of time, and not without a touch of selfishness, 'taking no care for me, though I have got so much on my back.' And so, in like manner, Mary is made out to be a monster of selfishness; 'Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?' She could not serve, she would only have been in Martha's road if she had tried. But she had one precious thing which was her very own, and she caught it up, and in the irrepressible burst of her thankful love, as she saw Lazarus sitting there at the table beside Jesus, she poured the liquid perfume on His head and feet. He casts His shield over the poor, unpractical woman, who did such an utterly useless thing, for which a basin of water and a towel would have served far better. (There are a great many useless things which, in Heaven's estimate, are more valuable than a great many apparently more practical ones.) Christ accepts the service, and in His deep words lays down three or four principles which it would do us all good to carry with us into our daily lives. So I shall now try to gather from these utterances of our Lord's some great truths about Christian service.

I. The first of them is the motive which hallows everything.

'She hath wrought a good work on Me.' Now that is pretty nearly a definition of what a good work is, and you see it is very unlike our conventional notions of what constitutes a 'good work.' Christ implies that anything, no matter what are its other characteristics, that is 'on' Him, that is to say, directed towards Him under the impulse of simple love to Him, is a 'good work'; and the converse follows, that nothing which has not that saving salt of reference to Him in it

deserves the title. Did you ever think of what an extraordinary position that is for a man to take up? 'Think about Me in what you do, and you will do good. Do anything, no matter what, because you love Me, and it will be lifted up into high regions, and become transfigured; a good work.' He took the best that any one could give Him, whether it was of outward possessions or of inward reverence, abject submission, and love and trust. He never said to any man, 'You are going over the score. You are exaggerating about Me. Stand up, for I also am a Man.' He did say once, 'Why callest thou Me good?' not because it was an incorrect attribution, but because it was a mere piece of conventional politeness. And in all other cases, not only does He accept as His rightful possession the utmost of reverence that any man can do Him, and bring Him, but He here implies, if He does not, as He almost does, specifically declare, that to be done for His sake lifts a deed into the region of 'good' works.

Have you reflected what such an attitude implies as to the self-consciousness of the Man who took it, and whether it is intelligible, not to say admirable, or rather whether it is not worthy of reprobation, except upon one hypothesis—'Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father,' and all men honour God when they honour the Incarnate Word? But that is aside from my present purpose.

Is not this conception, that the motive of reverence and love to Him ennobles and sanctifies every deed, the very fundamental principle of Christian morality? All things are sanctified when they are done for His sake. You plunge a poor pebble into a brook, and as the sunlit ripples pass over its surface, the hidden veins of delicate colour come out and glow, and the poor stone

looks a jewel, and is magnified as well as glorified by being immersed in the stream. Plunge your work into Christ, and do it for Him, and the giver and the gift will be greatened and sanctified.

But, brethren, if we take this point of view, and look to the motive, and not to the manner or the issues, or the immediate objects, of our actions, as determining whether they are good or no, it will revolutionise a great many of our thoughts, and bring new ideas into much of our conventional language. 'A good work' is not a piece of beneficence or benevolence, still less is it to be confined to those actions which conventional Christianity has chosen to dignify by the name. It is a designation that should not be clotted into certain specified corners of a life, but be extended over them all. The things which more specifically go under such a name, the kind of things that Judas wanted to have substituted for the utterly useless, lavish expenditure by this heart that was burdened with the weight of its own blessedness, come, or do not come, under the designation, according as there is present in them, not only natural charity to the poor whom 'ye have always with you,' but the higher reference of them to Christ Himself. All these lower forms of beneficence are imperfect without that. And instead of, as we have been taught by authoritative voices of late years, the service of man being the true service of God, the relation of the two terms is precisely the opposite, and it is the service of God that will effloresce into all service of man. Judas did not do much for the poor, and a great many other people who are sarcastic upon the 'folly,' the 'uncalculating impulses' of Christian love, with its 'wasteful expenditure,' and criticise us because we are spending time and energy and love upon

objects which they think are moonshine and mist, do little more than he did, and what beneficence they do exercise has to be hallowed by this reference to Jesus before it can aspire to be beneficence indeed.

I sometimes wish that this generation of Christian people, amid its multifarious schemes of beneficence, with none of which would one interfere for a moment, would sometimes let itself go into manifestations of its love to Jesus Christ, which had no use at all except to relieve its own burdened heart. I am afraid that the lower motives, which are all right and legitimate when they are lower, are largely hustling the higher ones into the background, and that the river has got so many ponds to fill, and so many canals to trickle through, and so many plantations to irrigate and make verdant, that there is a danger of its falling low at its fountain, and running shallow in its course. One sometimes would like to see more things done for Him that the world would call 'utter folly,' and 'prodigal waste,' and 'absolutely useless.' Jesus Christ has a great many strange things in His treasure-house—widows' mites, cups of water, Mary's broken vase—has He anything of yours? 'She hath wrought a good work on Me.'

II. Now, there is another lesson that I would gather from our Lord's apologising for Mary, and that is the measure and the manner of Christian service.

'She hath done what she could'; that is generally read as if it were an excuse. So it is, or at least it is a vindication of the manner and the direction of Mary's expression of love and devotion. But whilst it is an apologia for the form, it is a high demand in regard to the measure.

'She hath done what she could.' Christ would not have said that if she had taken a niggardly spoonful

out of the box of ointment, and dribbled that, in slow and half-grudging drops, on His head and feet. It was because it *all* went that it was to Him thus admirable. I think it is John Foster who says, 'Power to its last particle is duty.' The question is not how much have I done, or given, but could I have done or given more? We Protestants have indulgences of our own; the guinea or the hundred guineas that we give in a certain direction, we some of us seem to think, buy for us the right to do as we will with all the rest. But 'she hath done what she could.' It all went. And that is the law for us Christian people, because the Christian life is to be ruled by the great law of self-sacrifice, as the only adequate expression of our recognition of, and our being affected by, the great Sacrifice that gave Himself for us.

'Give all thou canst ! High Heaven rejects the lore  
Of nicely calculated less or more.'

But whilst thus there is here a definite demand for the entire surrender of ourselves and our activities to Jesus Christ, there is also the wonderful vindication of the idiosyncrasy of the worker, and the special manner of her gift. It was not Mary's *métier* to serve at the table, nor to do any practical thing. She did not know what there was for her to do ; but something she *must* do. So she caught up her alabaster box, and without questioning herself about the act, let her heart have its way, and poured it out on Christ. It was the only thing she could do, and she did it. It was a very useless thing. It was an entirely unnecessary expenditure of the perfume. There might have been a great many practical purposes found for it, but it was her way.

Christ says to each of us, Be yourselves, take circumstances, capacities, opportunities, individual character,

as laying down the lines along which you have to travel. Do not imitate other people. Do not envy other people; be yourselves, and let your love take its natural expression, whatever folk round you may snarl and sneer and carp and criticise. 'She hath done what she could,' and so He accepts the gift.

Engineers tell us that the steam-engine is a very wasteful machine, because so little of the energy is brought into actual operation. I am afraid that there are a great many of us Christian people like that, getting so much capacity, and turning out so little work. And there are a great many more of us who simply pick up the kind of work that is popular round us, and never consult our own bent, nor follow this humbly and bravely, wherever it will take us. 'She hath done what she could.'

III. And now the last thought that I would gather from these words is as to the significance and the perpetuity of the work which Christ accepts.

'She hath come beforehand to anoint My body to the burying.' I do not suppose that such a thought was in Mary's mind when she snatched up her box of ointment, and poured it out on Christ's head. But it was a meaning that He, in His tender pity and wise love and foresight, put into it, pathetically indicating, too, how the near Cross was filling His thought, even whilst He sat at the humble rustic feast in Bethany village.

He puts meaning into the service of love which He accepts. Yes, He always does. For all the little bits of service that we can bring get worked up into the great whole, the issues of which lie far beyond anything that we conceive. 'Thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain . . . and God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him.' We cast the seed



into the furrows. Who can tell what the harvest is going to be? We know nothing about the great issues that may suddenly, or gradually, burst from, or be evolved out of, the small deeds that we do. So, then, let us take care of the end, so to speak, which is under our control, and that is the motive. And Jesus Christ will take care of the other end that is beyond our control, and that is the issue. He will bring forth what seemeth to Him good, and we shall be as much astonished 'when we get yonder' at what has come out of what we did here, as poor Mary, standing there behind Him, was when He translated her act into so much higher a meaning than she had seen in it.

'Lord! when saw we Thee hungry and fed Thee?' We do not know what we are doing. We are like the Hindoo weavers that are said to weave their finest webs in dark rooms; and when the shutters come down, and not till then, shall we find out the meanings of our service of love.

Christ makes the work perpetual as well as significant by declaring that 'in the whole world this shall be preached for a memorial of her.' Have not 'the poor' got far more good out of Mary's box of ointment than the three hundred pence that a few of them lost by it? Has it not been an inspiration to the Church ever since? 'The house was filled with the odour of the ointment.' The fragrance was soon dissipated in the scentless air, but the deed smells sweet and blossoms for ever. It is perpetual in its record, perpetual in God's remembrance, perpetual in its results to the doer, and in its results in the world, though these may be indistinguishable, just as the brook is lost in the river and the river in the sea.

But did you ever notice that the Evangelist who

records the promise of perpetual remembrance of the act does not tell us who did it, and that the Evangelists who tell us who did it do not record the promise of perpetual remembrance? Never mind whether your deed is labelled with your address or not. God knows to whom it belongs, and that is enough. As Paul says in one of his letters, 'other my fellow-labourers also, whose names are in the Book of Life.' Apparently he had forgotten the names, or perhaps did not think it needful to occupy space in his letter with detailing them, and so makes that graceful, half-apologetic suggestion that they are inscribed on a more august page. The work and the worker are associated in that Book, and that is enough.

Brethren, the question of Judas is far more fitting when asked of other people than of Christians. 'To what purpose is this waste?' may well be said to those of you who are taking mind, and heart, and will, capacity, and energy, and all life, and using it for lower purposes than the service of God, and the manifestation of loving obedience to Jesus Christ. 'Why do ye spend money for that which is not bread?' Is it not waste to buy disappointments at the price of a soul and of a life? Why do ye spend that money thus? 'Whose image and superscription hath it?' Whose name is stamped upon our spirits? To whom should they be rendered? Better for us to ask ourselves the question to-day about all the godless parts of our lives, 'To what purpose is this waste?' than to have to ask it yonder! Everything but giving our whole selves to Jesus Christ is waste. It is not waste to lay ourselves and our possessions at His feet. 'He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for My sake, the same shall find it.'

## A SECRET RENDEZVOUS

'And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, His disciples said unto Him, Where wilt Thou that we go and prepare that Thou mayest eat the passover? 13. And He sendeth forth two of His disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. 14. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with My disciples? 15. And he will show you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us. 16. And His disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as He had said unto them: and they made ready the passover.'—MARK xiv. 12-16.

THIS is one of the obscurer and less noticed incidents, but perhaps it contains more valuable teaching than appears at first sight.

The first question is—Miracle or Plan? Does the incident mean supernatural knowledge or a preconcerted token, like the provision of the ass at the entry into Jerusalem? I think that there is nothing decisive either way in the narrative. Perhaps the balance of probability lies in favour of the latter theory. A difficulty in its way is that no communication seems to pass between the two disciples and the man by which he could know them to be the persons whom he was to precede to the house. There are advantages in either theory which the other loses; but, on the whole, I incline to believe in a preconcerted signal. If we lose the supernatural, we gain a suggestion of prudence and human adaptation of means to ends which makes the story even more startlingly real to us.

But whichever theory we adopt, the main points and lessons of the narrative remain the same.

I. The remarkable thing in the story is the picture it

gives us of Christ as elaborately adopting precautions to conceal the place.

They are at Bethany. The disciples ask where the passover is to be eaten. The easy answer would have been to tell the name of the man and his house. That is not given. The deliberate round-aboutness of the answer remains the same whether miracle or plan. The two go away, and the others know nothing of the place. Probably the messengers did not come back, but in the evening Jesus and the ten go straight to the house which only He knew.

All this secrecy is in strong contrast with His usual frank and open appearances.

What is the reason? To baffle the traitor by preventing him from acquiring previous knowledge of the place. He was watching for some quiet hour in Jerusalem to take Jesus. So Christ does not eat the passover at the house of any well-known disciple who had a house in Jerusalem, but goes to some man unknown to the Apostolic circle, and takes steps to prevent the place being known beforehand.

All this looks like the ordinary precautions which a man who knew of the plots against him would take, and might mean simply a wish to save his life. But is that the whole explanation? *Why* did He wish to baffle the traitor?

(a) Because of His desire to eat the passover with the disciples. His loving sympathy.

(b) Because of His desire to found the new rite of His kingdom.

(c) Because of His desire to bring His death into immediate connection with the Paschal sacrifice. There was no reason of a selfish kind, no shrinking from death itself.

The fact that such precautions only meet us here, and that they stand in strongest contrast with the rest of His conduct, emphasises the purely voluntary nature of His death: how He *chose* to be betrayed, taken, and to die. They suggest the same thought as do the staggering back of His would-be captors in Gethsemane, at His majestic word, 'I am He. . . . Let these go their way.' The narrative sets Him forth as the Lord of all circumstances, as free, and arranging all events.

Judas, the priests, Pilate, the soldiers, were swept by a power which they did not know to deeds which they did not understand. The Lord of all gives Himself up in royal freedom to the death to which nothing dragged Him but His own love.

Such seem to be the lessons of this narrative in so far as it bears on our Lord's own thoughts and feelings.

II. We note also the authoritative claim which He makes.

One reading is 'my guest-chamber,' and that makes His claim even more emphatic; but apart from that, the language is strong in its expression of a right to this unknown man's 'upper room.' Mark the singular blending here, as in all His earthly life, of poverty and dignity—the lowliness of being obliged to a man for a room; the royal style, 'The Master saith.'

So even now there is the blending of the wonderful fact that He puts Himself in the position of needing anything from us, with the absolute authority which He claims over us and ours.

III. The answer and blessedness of the unknown disciple.

(a) Jesus knows disciples whom the other disciples know not.

This man was one of the 'secret' disciples. There is no excuse for shrinking from confession of His name; but it is blessed to believe that His eye sees many a 'hidden one.' He recognises their faith, and gives them work to do. Add the striking thought that though this man's name is unrecorded by the Evangelist, it is known to Christ, was written in His heart, and, to use the prophetic image, 'was graven on the palms of His hands.'

(b) The true blessedness is to be ready for whatever calls He may make on us. These may sometimes be sudden and unlooked for. But the preparation for obeying the most sudden or exacting summons of His is to have our hearts in fellowship with Him.

(c) The blessedness of His coming into our hearts, and accepting our service.

How honoured that man felt then! how much more so as years went on! how most of all now!

Our greatest blessedness that He does come into the narrow room of our hearts: 'If any man open the door, I will sup with him.'

## THE NEW PASSOVER

'And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the Passover, His disciples said unto Him, Where wilt Thou that we go and prepare that Thou mayest eat the Passover? 13. And He sendeth forth two of His disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. 14. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the Passover with My disciples? 15. And he will shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us. 16. And His disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as He had said unto them: and they made ready the Passover. 17. And in the evening He cometh with the twelve. 18. And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with Me shall betray Me. 19. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto Him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I? 20. And He answered and said unto them, It is one of the twelve, that dippeth with Me in the dish. 21. The Son of Man indeed goeth, as it is written of Him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born. 22. And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is My body. 23. And He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them: and they all drank of it. 24. And He said unto them, This is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. 25. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God. 26. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.'—MARK xiv. 12-26.

THIS passage falls into three sections—the secret preparation for the Passover (verses 12-17), the sad announcement of the betrayer (verses 18-21), and the institution of the Lord's Supper (verses 22-26). It may be interesting to notice that in the two former of these Mark's account approximates to Luke's, while in the third he is nearer Matthew's. A comparison of the three accounts, noting the slight, but often significant, variations, should be made. Nothing in the Gospels is trivial. 'The dust of that land is gold.'

I. The secret preparation for the Passover. The three Evangelists all give the disciples' question, but only Luke tells us that it was in answer to our Lord's command to Peter and John to go and prepare the Passover. They very naturally said 'Where?' as they were all strangers in Jerusalem. Matthew may not have known of our Lord's initiative; but if Mark were,

as he is, with apparent correctness, said to have been, Peter's mouthpiece in his Gospel, the reticence as to the prominence of that Apostle is natural, and explains the omission of all but the bare fact of the despatch of the two. The curiously roundabout way in which they are directed to the 'upper room' is only explicable on the supposition that it was intended to keep them in the dark till the last moment, so that no hint might leak from them to Judas. Whether the token of the man with the waterpot was a preconcerted signal or an instance of our Lord's supernatural knowledge and sovereign sway, his employment as a silent and probably unconscious guide testifies to Christ's wish for that last hour to be undisturbed. A man carrying a water-pot, which was woman's special task, would be a conspicuous figure even in the festival crowds. The message to the householder implies that he recognised 'the Master' as his Master, and was ready to give up at His requisition even the chamber which he had prepared for his own family celebration of the feast.

Thus instructed, the two trusted Apostles left Bethany, early in the day, without a clue of their destination reaching Judas's hungry watchfulness. Evidently they did not return, and in the evening Jesus led the others straight to the place. Mark says that He came 'with the twelve'; but he does not mean thereby to specify the number, but to define the class, of His attendants.

Each figure in this preparatory scene yields important lessons. Our Lord's earnest desire to secure that still hour before pushing out into the storm speaks pathetically of His felt need of companionship and strengthening, as well as of His self-forgetting purpose to help His handful of bewildered followers and His human longing



to live in faithful memories. His careful arrangements bring vividly into sight the limitations of His manhood, in that He, 'by whom all things consist,' had to contrive and plan in order to baffle for a moment His pursuers. And, side by side with the lowliness, as ever, is the majesty; for while He stoops to arrange, He sees with superhuman certitude what will happen, moves unconscious feet with secret and sovereign sway, and in royal tones claims possession of His servant's possessions.

The two messengers, sent out with instructions which would only guide them half-way to their destination, and obliged, if they were to move at all, to trust absolutely to His knowledge, present specimens of the obedience still required. He sends us out still on a road full of sharp turnings round which we cannot see. We get light enough for the first stage; and when it is traversed, the second will be plainer.

The man with the water-pot reminds us how little we may be aware of the Hand which guides us, or of our uses in His plans. 'I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me,'—how little the poor water-bearer knew who were following, or dreamed that he and his load would be remembered for ever!

The householder responded at once, and gladly, to the authoritative message, which does not ask a favour, but demands a right. Probably he had intended to celebrate the Passover with his own family, in the large chamber on the roof, with the cool evening air about it, and the moonlight sleeping around. But he gladly gives it up. Are we as ready to surrender our cherished possessions for His use?

II. The sad announcement of the traitor (verses 18-21). As the Revised Version indicates more clearly than

the Authorised, the purport of the announcement was not merely that the betrayer was an Apostle, but that he was to be known by his dipping his hand into the common dish at the same moment as our Lord. The prophetic psalm would have been abundantly fulfilled though Judas's fingers had never touched Christ's; but the minute accomplishment should teach us that Jewish prophecy was the voice of divine foreknowledge, and embraced small details as well as large tendencies. Many hands dipped with Christ's, and so the sign was not unmistakably indicative, and hence was privately supplemented, as John tells us, by the giving of 'the sop.' The uncertainty as to the indication given by the token is reflected by the reiterated questions of the Apostles, which, in the Greek, are cast in a form that anticipates a negative answer: 'Surely not I?' Mark omits the audacious hypocrisy of Judas's question in the same form, and Christ's curt, sad answer which Matthew gives. His brief and vivid sketch is meant to fix attention on the unanimous shuddering horror of these faithful hearts at the thought that they could be thus guilty—a horror which was not the child of presumptuous self-confidence, but of hearty, honest love. They thought it impossible, as they felt the throbbing of their own hearts—and yet—and yet—might it not be? As they probed their hearts deeper, they became dimly aware of dark gulfs of possible unfaithfulness half visible there, and so betook themselves to their Master, and strengthened their loyalty by the question, which breathed at once detestation of the treason and humble distrust of themselves. It is well to feel and speak the strong recoil from sin of a heart loyal to Jesus. It is better to recognise the sleeping snakes, the possibilities of evil in ourselves, and to take to Christ our ignorance

and self-distrust. It is wiser to cry 'Is it I?' than to boast, 'Although all shall be offended, yet will not I.' 'Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.'

Our Lord answers the questions by a still more emphatic repetition of the distinctive mark, and then, in verse 21, speaks deep words of mingled pathos, dignity, and submission. The voluntariness of His death, and its uniqueness as His own act of return to His eternal home, are contained in that majestic 'goeth,' which asserts the impotence of the betrayer and his employers, without the Lord's own consent. On the other hand, the necessity to which He willingly bowed is set forth in that 'as it is written of Him.' And what sadness and lofty consciousness of His own sacred personality and judicial authority are blended in the awful sentence on the traitor! What was He that treachery to Him should be a crime so transcendent? What right had He thus calmly to pronounce condemnation? Did He see into the future? Is it the voice of a Divine Judge, or of a man judging in his own cause, which speaks this passionless sentence? Surely none of His sayings are more fully charged with His claims to pre-existence, divinity, and judicial authority, than this which He spoke at the very moment when the traitor's plot was on the verge of success.

III. The institution of the Lord's Supper (verses 22-26). Mark's account is the briefest of the three, and his version of Christ's words the most compressed. It omits the affecting 'Do this for remembering Me,' which is pre-supposed by the very act of instituting the ordinance, since it is nothing if not memorial; and it makes prominent two things—the significance of the elements, and the command to partake of them. To these must be added Christ's attitude in 'blessing' the bread and cup,

and His distribution of them among the disciples. The Passover was to Israel the commemoration of their redemption from captivity and their birth as a nation. Jesus puts aside this divinely appointed and venerable festival to set in its stead the remembrance of Himself. That night, 'to be much remembered of the children of Israel,' is to be forgotten, and come no more into the number of the months; and its empty place is to be filled by the memory of the hours then passing. Surely His act was either arrogance or the calm consciousness of the unique significance and power of His death. Think of any mere teacher or prophet doing the like! The world would meet the preposterous claim implied with deserved and inextinguishable laughter. Why does it not do so with Christ's act?

Christ's view of His death is written unmistakably on the Lord's Supper. It is not merely that He wishes *it* rather than His life, His miracles, or words, to be kept in thankful remembrance, but that He desires one aspect of it to be held high and clear above all others. He is the true 'Passover Lamb,' whose shed and sprinkled blood establishes new bonds of amity and new relations, with tender and wonderful reciprocal obligations, between God and the 'many' who truly partake of that sacrifice. The key-words of Judaism—'sacrifice,' 'covenant,' 'sprinkling with blood'—are taken over into Christianity, and the ideas they represent are set in its centre, to be cherished as its life. The Lord's Supper is the conclusive answer to the allegation that Christ did not teach the sacrificial character and atoning power of His death. What, then, did He teach when He said, 'This is My blood of the covenant, which is shed for many'?

The Passover was a family festival, and that char-

acteristic passes over to the Lord's Supper. Christ is not only the food on which we feed, but the Head of the family and distributor of the banquet. He is the feast and the Governor of the feast, and all who sit at that table are 'brethren.' One life is in them all, and they are one as partakers of One.

The Lord's Supper is a visible symbol of the Christian life, which should not only be all lived in remembrance of Him, but consists in partaking by faith of His life, and incorporating it in ours, until we come to the measure of perfect men, which, in one aspect, we reach when we can say, 'I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.'

There is a prophetic element, as well as a commemorative and symbolic, in the Lord's Supper, which is prominent in Christ's closing words. He does not partake of the symbols which He gives; but there comes a time, in that perfected form of the kingdom, when perfect love shall make all the citizens perfectly conformed to the perfect will of God. Then, whatsoever associations of joy, of invigoration, of festal fellowship, clustered round the wine-cup here, shall be heightened, purified, and perpetuated in the calm raptures of the heavenly feast, in which He will be Partaker, as well as Giver and Food. 'Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures.' The King's lips will touch the golden cup filled with unfoaming wine, ere He commends it to His guests. And from that feast they will 'go no more out,' neither shall the triumphant music of its great 'hymn' be followed by any Olivet or Gethsemane, or any denial, or any Calvary; but there shall be 'no more sorrow, nor sin, nor death'; for 'the former things are passed away,' and He has made 'all things new.'

## ‘IS IT I?’

‘Is it I?’—MARK xiv. 18.

THE scene shows that Judas had not as yet drawn any suspicion on himself.

Here the Apostles seem to be higher than their ordinary stature; for they do not take to questioning one another, or even to protest, ‘No!’ but to questioning Christ.

### I. The solemn prophecy.

It seems strange at first sight that our Lord should have introduced such thoughts then, disturbing the sweet repose of that hallowed hour. But the terrible fact of the betrayal was naturally suggested by the emblems of His death, and still more by the very confiding familiarity of that hour. His household were gathered around Him, and the more close and confidential the intercourse, the bitterer that thought to Him, that one of the little band was soon to play the traitor. It is the cry of His wounded love, the wail of His unrequited affection, and, so regarded, is infinitely touching. It is an instance of that sad insight into man’s heart which in His divinity He possessed. What a fountain of sorrow for His manhood was that knowledge! how it increases the pathos of His tenderness! Not only did He read hearts as they thought and felt in the present, but He read their future with more than a prophet’s insight. He saw how many buds of promise would shrivel, how many would ‘go away and walk no more with Him.’

That solemn prophecy may well be pondered by all Christian assemblies, and specially when gathered for

the observance of the Lord's Supper. Perhaps never since that first institution has a community met to celebrate it without Him who 'walks amid the candlesticks,' with eyes as a flame of fire marking a Judas among the disciples. There is, I think, no doubt that Judas partook of the Lord's Supper. But be that as it may, he was among the number, and our Lord knew him to be 'the traitor.'

In its essence Judas's sin can be repeated still, and the thought of that possibility may well mingle with the grateful and adoring contemplations suitable to the act of partaking of the Lord's Supper. In the hour of holiest Christian emotion the thought that I may betray the Lord who has died for me will be especially hateful, and to remember the possibility then will do much to prevent its ever becoming a reality.

## II. The self-distrustful question, 'Is it I?'

It suggests that the possibilities of the darkest sin are in each of us, and especially, that the sin of treason towards Christ is in each of us.

Think generally of the awful possibilities of sin in every soul.

All sin has one root, so it is capable of passing from one form to another as light, heat, and motion do, or like certain diseases that are Protean in their forms. One sin is apt to draw others after it. 'None shall want her mate.' Wild beasts of 'the desert' meet with wild beasts of 'the islands.' Sins are gregarious, as it were; they 'hunt in couples.' 'Then goeth he, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself.'

The roots of all sin are in each. Men may think that they are protected from certain forms of sin by temperament, but identity of nature is deeper than varieties of temperament. The greatest sins are committed by

yielding to very common motives. Love of money is not a rare feeling, but it led Judas to betray Jesus. Anger is thought to be scarcely a sin at all, but it often moves an arm to murder.

Temptations to each sin are round us all. We walk in a tainted atmosphere.

There is progress in evil. No man reaches the extreme of depravity at a bound. Judas's treachery was of slow growth.

So still there is the constant operation and pressure of forces and tendencies drawing us away from Jesus Christ. We, every one of us, know that, if we allowed our nature to have its way, we should leave Him and 'make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience.' The forms in which we might do it might vary, but do it we should. We are like a man desperately clutching some rocky projection on the face of a precipice, who knows that if once he lets go, he will be dashed to pieces. 'There goes John Bradford, but for the grace of God!' But for this same restraining grace, to what depths might we not sink? So, in all Christian hearts there should be profound consciousness of their own weakness. The man 'who fears no fall' is sure to have one. It is perilous to march through an enemy's country in loose order, without scouts and rearguard. Rigorous control is ever necessary. Brotherly judgment, too, of others should result from our consciousness of weakness. Examples of others falling are not to make us say cynically, 'We are all alike,' but to set us to think humbly of ourselves, and to supplicate divine keeping, 'Lord, save *me*, or I perish!'

III. The safety of the self-distrustful.

When the consciousness of possible falling is brought home to us, we shall carry, if we are wise, all our doubts



as to ourselves to Jesus. There is safety in asking Him, 'Is it I?' To bare our inmost selves before Him, and not to shrink, even if that piercing gaze lights on hidden meannesses and incipient treachery, may be painful, but is healing. He will keep us from yielding to the temptation of which we are aware, and which we tell frankly to Him. The lowly sense of our own liability to fall, if it drives us closer to Him, will make it certain that we shall not fall.

While the other disciples asked 'Is it I?' John asked 'Who is it?' The disciple who leaned on Christ's bosom was bathed in such a consciousness of Christ's love that treason against it was impossible. He, alone of the Evangelists, records his question, and he tells us that he put it, 'leaning back as he was, on Jesus's breast.' For the purpose of whispering his interrogation, he changed his attitude for a moment so as to press still closer to Jesus. How could one who was thus nestling nearer to that heart be the betrayer? The consciousness of Christ's love, accompanied with the effort to draw closer to Him, is our surest defence against every temptation to faithlessness or betrayal of Him.

Any other fancied ground of security is deceptive, and will sooner or later crumble beneath our deceived feet. On this very occasion, Peter built a towering fabric of profession of unalterable fidelity on such shifting ground, and saw it collapse into ruin in a few hours. Let us profit by the lesson!

That wholesome consciousness of our weakness need not shade with sadness the hours of communion, but it may well help us to turn them to their highest use in making them occasions for lowlier self-distrust and closer cleaving to Him. If we thus use our sense of weakness, the sweet security will enter our souls that

belongs to those who have trusted in the great promise: 'He shall not fall, for God is able to make him stand.' The blessed ones who are kept from falling and 'presented faultless before the presence of His glory,' will hear with wonder the voice of the Judge ascribing to them deeds of service to Him of which they had not been conscious, and will have to ask once more the old question, but with a new meaning: 'Lord, is it I? when saw we Thee an hungered, and fed Thee?'

## ‘STRONG CRYING AND TEARS’

‘And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane : and He saith to His disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray. 33. And He taketh with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy ; 34. And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death : tarry ye here, and watch. 35. And He went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. 36. And He said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee ; take away this cup from Me : nevertheless not what I will, but what Thou wilt. 37. And He cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour? 38. Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak. 39. And again He went away, and prayed, and spake the same words. 40. And when He returned, He found them asleep again, (for their eyes were heavy,) neither wist they what to answer Him. 41. And He cometh the third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest, it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42. Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth Me is at hand.’  
—MARK XIV. 32-42.

THE three who saw Christ’s agony in Gethsemane were so little affected that they slept. We have to beware of being so little affected that we speculate and seek to analyse rather than to bow adoringly before that mysterious and heart-subduing sight. Let us remember that the place is ‘holy ground.’ It was meant that we should look on the Christ who prayed ‘with strong crying and tears,’ else the three sleepers would not have accompanied Him so far; but it was meant that our gaze should be reverent and from a distance, else they would have gone with Him into the shadow of the olives.

‘Gethsemane’ means ‘an oil-press.’ It was an enclosed piece of ground, according to Matthew and Mark; a garden, according to John. Jesus, by some means, had access to it, and had ‘oft-times resorted thither with His disciples.’ To this familiar spot, with its many happy associations, Jesus led the disciples, who would simply expect to pass the night there, as many Passover visitors were accustomed to bivouac in the open air.

The triumphant tone of spirit which animated His assuring words to His disciples, 'I have overcome the world,' changed as they passed through the moonlight down to the valley, and when they reached the garden deep gloom lay upon Him. His agitation is pathetically and most naturally indicated by the conflict of feeling as to companionship. He leaves the other disciples at the entrance, for He would fain be alone in His prayer. Then, a moment after, He bids the three, who had been on the Mount of Transfiguration and with Him at many other special times, accompany Him into the recesses of the garden. But again need of solitude overcomes longing for companionship, and He bids them stay where they were, while He plunges still further into the shadow. How human it is! How well all of us, who have been down into the depths of sorrow, know the drawing of these two opposite longings!

Scripture seldom undertakes to tell Christ's emotions. Still seldomer does He speak of them. But at this tremendous hour the veil is lifted by one corner, and He Himself is fain to relieve His bursting heart by pathetic self-revelation, which is in fact an appeal to the three for sympathy, as well as an evidence of His sharing the common need of lightening the burdened spirit by speech. Mark's description of Christ's feelings lays stress first on their beginning, and then on their nature as being astonishment and anguish. A wave of emotion swept over Him, and was in marked contrast with His previous demeanour.

The three had never seen their calm Master so moved. We feel that such agitation is profoundly unlike the serenity of the rest of His life, and especially remarkable if contrasted with the tone of John's

account of His discourse in the upper room; and, if we are wise, we shall gaze on that picture drawn for us by Mark with reverent gratitude, and feel that we look at something more sacred than human trembling at the thought of death.

Our Lord's own infinitely touching words heighten the impression of the Evangelist's 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful,' or, as the word literally means, 'ringed round with sorrow.' A dark orb of distress encompassed Him, and there was nowhere a break in the gloom which shut Him in. And this is He who, but an hour before, had bequeathed His 'joy' to His servants, and had bidden them 'be of good cheer,' since He had 'conquered the world.'

Dare we ask what were the elements of that all-enveloping horror of great darkness? Reverently we may. That astonishment and distress no doubt were partly due to the recoil of flesh from death. But if that was their sole cause, Jesus has been surpassed in heroism, not only by many a martyr who drew his strength from Him, but by many a rude soldier and by many a criminal. No! The waters of the baptism with which He was baptized had other sources than that, though it poured a tributary stream into them.

We shall not understand Gethsemane at all, nor will it touch our hearts and wills as it is meant to do, unless, as we look, we say in adoring wonder, 'The Lord hath made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all.' It was the weight of the world's sin which He took on Him by willing identification of Himself with men, that pressed Him to the ground. Nothing else than the atoning character of Christ's sufferings explains so far as it can be explained, the agony which we are permitted to behold afar off.

How nearly that agony was fatal is taught us by His own word 'unto death.' A little more, and He would have died. Can we retain reverence for Jesus as a perfect and pattern man, in view of His paroxysm of anguish in Gethsemane, if we refuse to accept that explanation? Truly was the place named 'The Olive-press,' for in it His whole being was as if in the press, and another turn of the screw would have crushed Him.

Darkness ringed Him round, but there was a rift in it right overhead. Prayer was His refuge, as it must be ours. The soul that can cry, 'Abba, Father!' does not walk in unbroken night. His example teaches us what our own sorrows should also teach us—to be-take ourselves to prayer when the spirit is desolate. In that wonderful prayer we reverently note three things: there is unbroken consciousness of the Father's love; there is the instinctive recoil of flesh and the sensitive nature from the suffering imposed; and there is the absolute submission of the will, which silences the remonstrance of flesh. Whatever the weight laid on Jesus by His bearing of the sins of the world, it did not take from Him the sense of sonship. But, on the other hand, that sense did not take from Him the consciousness that the world's sin lay upon Him. In like manner His cry on the Cross mysteriously blended the sense of communion with God and of abandonment by God. Into these depths we see but a little way, and adoration is better than speculation.

Jesus shrank from 'this cup,' in which so many bitter ingredients besides death were mingled, such as treachery, desertion, mocking, rejection, exposure to 'the contradiction of sinners.' There was no failure of purpose in that recoil, for the cry for exemption was immediately followed by complete submission to the

Father's will. No perturbation in the lower nature ever caused His fixed resolve to waver. The needle always pointed to the pole, however the ship might pitch and roll. A prayer in which 'remove this from me' is followed by that yielding 'nevertheless' is always heard. Christ's was heard, for calmness came back, and His flesh was stilled and made ready for the sacrifice.

So He could rejoin the three, in whose sympathy and watchfulness He had trusted—and they all were asleep! Surely that was one ingredient of bitterness in His cup. We wonder at their insensibility; and how they must have wondered at it too, when after years taught them what they had lost, and how faithless they had been! Think of men who could have seen and heard that scene, which has drawn the worshipping regard of the world ever since, missing it all because they fell asleep! They had kept awake long enough to see Him fall on the ground and to hear His prayer, but, worn out by a long day of emotion and sorrow, they slept.

Jesus was probably rapt in prayer for a considerable time, perhaps for a literal 'hour.' He was specially touched by Peter's failure, so sadly contrasted with his confident professions in the upper room; but no word of blame escaped Him. Rather He warned them of swift-coming temptation, which they could only overcome by watchfulness and prayer. It was indeed near, for the soldiers would burst in, before many minutes had passed, polluting the moonlight with their torches and disturbing the quiet night with their shouts. What gracious allowance for their weakness and loving recognition of the disciples' imperfect good lie in His words, which are at once an excuse

for their fault and an enforcement of His command to watch and pray! 'The flesh is weak,' and hinders the willing spirit from doing what it wills. It was an apology for the slumber of the three; it is a merciful statement of the condition under which all discipleship has to be carried on. 'He knoweth our frame.' Therefore we all need to watch and pray, since only by such means can weak flesh be strengthened and strong flesh weakened, or the spirit preserved in willingness.

The words were not spoken in reference to Himself, but in a measure were true of Him. His second withdrawal for prayer seems to witness that the victory won by the first supplication was not permanent. Again the anguish swept over His spirit in another foaming breaker, and again He sought solitude, and again He found tranquillity—and again returned to find the disciples asleep. 'They knew not what to answer Him' in extenuation of their renewed dereliction.

Yet a third time the struggle was renewed. And after that, He had no need to return to the seclusion, where He had fought, and now had conclusively conquered by prayer and submission. We too may, by the same means, win partial victories over self, which may be interrupted by uprisings of flesh; but let us persevere. Twice Jesus' calm was broken by recrudescence of horror and shrinking; the third time it came back, to abide through all the trying scenes of the passion, but for that one cry on the Cross, 'Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' So it may be with us.

The last words to the three have given commentators much trouble. 'Sleep on now, and take your rest,' is not so much irony as 'spoken with a kind of permissive force, and in tones in which merciful reproach



was blended with calm resignation.' So far as He was concerned, there was no reason for their waking. But they had lost an opportunity, never to return, of helping Him in His hour of deepest agony. He needed them no more. And do not we in like manner often lose the brightest opportunities of service by untimely slumber of soul, and is not 'the irrevocable past' saying to many of us, 'Sleep on now, since you can no more do what you have let slip from your drowsy hands'?

'It is enough' is obscure, but probably refers to the disciples' sleep, and prepares for the transition to the next words, which summon them to arise, not to help Him by watching, but to meet the traitor. They had slept long enough, He sadly says. That which will effectually end their sleepiness is at hand. How completely our Lord had regained His calm superiority to the horror which had shaken Him is witnessed by that majestic 'Let us be going.' He will go out to meet the traitor, and, after one flash of power, which smote the soldiers to the ground, will yield Himself to the hands of sinners.

The Man who lay prone in anguish beneath the olive-trees comes forth in serene tranquillity, and gives Himself up to the death for us all. His agony was endured for us, and needs for its explanation the fact that it was so. His victory through prayer was for us, that we too might conquer by the same weapons. His voluntary surrender was for us, that 'by His stripes we might be healed.' Surely we shall not sleep, as did these others, but, moved by His sorrows and animated by His victory, watch and pray that we may share in the virtue of His sufferings and imitate the example of His submission.

## THE SLEEPING APOSTLE

'Simon, sleepest thou?'—MARK xiv. 37.'

It is a very old Christian tradition that this Gospel is in some sense the Apostle Peter's. There are not many features in the Gospel itself which can be relied on as confirming this idea. Perhaps one such may be found in this plaintive remonstrance, which is only preserved for us here. Matthew's Gospel, indeed, tells us that the rebuke was addressed to Peter, but blunts the sharp point of it as directed to him, by throwing it into the plural, as if spoken to all the three slumberers: 'What, could ye not watch with Me one hour?' To Matthew, the special direction of the words was unimportant, but Peter could never forget how the Master had come out from the shadow of the olives to him lying there in the moonlight, and stood before him worn with His solitary agony, and in a voice yet tremulous from His awful conflict, had said to *him*, so lately loud in his professions of fidelity, 'Sleepest thou?'

It was but an hour or two since he had been saying, and meaning, 'I will lay down my life for Thy sake,' and this was what all that fervour had come to. No wonder if there is almost a tone of surprise discernible in our Lord's word, as if He who 'marvelled at the unbelief' of those who were not His followers, marvelled still more at the imperfect sympathy of those who were, and marvelled most of all at such a sudden ebb of such a flood of devotion. Surprise and sorrow, the pain of a loving heart thrown back upon itself, the sharp pang of feeling how much less one is loved than one loves, the pleading with His forgetful servant,

rebuke without anger, all breathe through the question, so pathetic in its simplicity, so powerful to bow in contrition by reason of its very gentleness and self-restraint.

The record of this Evangelist proves how deep it sank into the impulsive, loving heart of the apostle, and yet the denials in the high priest's palace, which followed so soon, show how much less power it had on him on the day when it was spoken, than it gained as he looked back on it through the long vista of years that had passed, when he told the story to Mark.

The first lesson to be gathered from these words is drawn from the name by which our Lord here addresses the apostle: '*Simon, sleepest thou?*'

Now the usage of Mark's Gospel in reference to this apostle's name is remarkably uniform and precise. Both his names occur in Mark's catalogue of the Apostles: '*Simon he surnamed Peter.*' He is never called by both again, but before that point he is always Simon, and after it he is always Peter, except in this verse. The other Evangelists show similar purpose, for the most part, in their interchange of the names. Luke, for instance, always calls him Simon up to the same point as Mark, except once where he uses the form '*Simon Peter,*' and thereafter always Peter, except in Christ's solemn warning, '*Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you,*' and in the report of the tidings that met the disciples on their return from Emmaus, '*The Lord hath appeared to Simon.*' So Matthew calls him Simon in the story of the first miraculous draught of fishes, and in the catalogue of Apostles, and afterwards uniformly Peter, except in Christ's answer to the apostle's great confession, where

He names him 'Simon Bar Jona,' in order, as would appear, to bring into more solemn relief the significance of the immediately following words, 'Thou art Peter.' In John's Gospel, again, we find the two forms 'Simon Peter' and the simple 'Peter' used throughout with almost equal frequency, while 'Simon' is only employed at the very beginning, and in the heart-piercing triple question at the end, 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?'

The conclusion seems a fair one from these details that, on the whole, the name Simon brings into prominence the natural unrenewed humanity, and the name Peter suggests the Apostolic office, the bold confessor, the impulsive, warm-hearted lover and follower of the Lord. And it is worth noticing that, with one exception, the instances in which he is called by his former name, after his designation to the apostolate, occur in words addressed to him by our Lord.

He had given the name, and surely His withdrawal of it was meant to be significant, and must have struck with boding, rebuking emphasis on the ear and conscience of the apostle. 'Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you': 'Remember thy human weakness, and in the sore conflict that is before thee, trust not to thine own power.' 'Simon, sleepest thou?' 'Can I call thee Peter now, when thou hast not cared for My sorrow enough to wake while I wrestled? Is this thy fervid love?' 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?' 'Thou wast Peter because thou didst confess Me; thou hast fallen back to thine old level by denying Me. It is not enough that in secret I should have restored thee to My love. Here before thy brethren, thou must win back thy forfeited name and place by a confession as open as the denial, and thrice

repeated like it. Once thou hast answered, but still thou art "Simon." Twice thou hast answered, but not yet can I call thee "Peter." Thrice thou hast answered, by each reply effacing a former denial, and now I ask no more. Take back thine office; henceforth thou shalt be called "Cephas" as before.'

And so it was. In the Acts of the Apostles, and in Paul's letters, 'Peter' or 'Cephas' entirely obliterates 'Simon.' Only for ease in finding him, the messengers of Cornelius are to ask for him in Joppa by the name by which he would be known outside the Church, and his old companion James begins his speech to the council at Jerusalem by referring with approbation to what 'Simeon' had said, as if he liked to use the old name, that brought back memories of the far-off days in Galilee, before they had known the Master.

Very touching, too, is it to notice how the apostle himself, while using the name by which he was best known in the Church, in the introduction to his first Epistle, calls himself 'Simon Peter' in his second, as if to the end he felt that the old nature clung to him, and was not yet, 'so long as he was in this tabernacle,' wholly subdued under the dominion of the better self, which his Master had breathed into him.

So we see that a bit of biography and an illustration of a large truth are wrapped up for us in so small a matter as the apparently fortuitous use of one or other of these names. I do not suppose that in every instance where either of them occur, we can explain their occurrence by a reference to such thoughts. But still there is an unmistakable propriety in several instances in the employment of one rather than the other, and we may fairly suggest the lesson as put here in a picturesque form, which Paul gives us in definite

words, 'The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.' The better and the worse nature contend in all Christian souls, or, as our Lord says with such merciful leniency in this very context, 'The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.' However real and deep the change which passes over us when 'Christ is formed in us,' it is only by degrees that the transformation spreads through our being. The renewing process follows upon the bestowment of the new life, and works from its deep inward centre outwards and upwards to the circumference and surface of our being, on condition of our own constant diligence and conflict.

True, 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature'; but also, and precisely because he is, therefore the daily and hourly exhortation is, 'Put on the new man.' The leaven is buried in the dough, and must be well kneaded up with it if the whole is to be leavened. Peter is still Simon, and sometimes seems to be so completely Simon that he has ceased to be Peter. He continues Simon Peter to his own consciousness to the very end, however his brethren call him. The struggle between the two elements in his nature makes the undying interest of his story, and brings him nearer to us than any of the other disciples are. We, too, have to wage the conflict between the old nature and the new; for us, too, the worse part seems too often to be the stronger, if not the only part. The Master has often to speak to us, as if His merciful all-seeing eye could discern in us nothing of our better selves which are in truth Himself, and has to question our love. We, too, have often to feel how little those who think best of us know what we are. But let us take heart and remember that from every fall it is possible to rise by penitence and secret

converse with Him, and that if only we remember to the end our lingering weakness, and 'giving all diligence,' cleave to Him, 'an entrance shall be ministered unto us abundantly into His everlasting kingdom.'

We may briefly notice, too, some other lessons from this slumbering apostle.

Let us learn, for instance, to distrust our own resolutions. An hour or two at the most had passed since the eager protestation, 'Though all should deny Thee, yet will not I. I will lay down my life for Thy sake.' It had been most honestly said, at the dictate of a very loving heart, which in its enthusiasm was over-estimating its own power of resistance, and taking no due account of obstacles. The very utterance of the rash vow made him weaker, for some of his force was expended in making it. The uncalculating, impulsive nature of the man makes him a favourite with all readers, and we sympathise with him, as a true brother, when we hear him blurting out his big words, followed so soon by such a contradiction in deeds. He is the same man all through his story, always ready to push himself into dangers, always full of rash confidence, which passes at once into abject fear when the dangers which he had not thought about appear.

His sleep in the garden, following close on his bold words in the upper chamber, is just like his eager wish to come to Christ on the water, followed by his terror. He desires to be singled out from the others; he desires to be beside his Master, and then as soon as he feels a dash of spray on his cheek, and the heaving of that uneasy floor beneath him, all his confidence collapses and he shrieks to Christ to save him. It is just like his thrusting himself into the high priest's palace—no safe place, and bad company for him by

the coal fire—and then his courage oozing out at his fingers' ends as soon as a maidservant's sharp tongue questioned him. It is just like his hearty welcome of the heathen converts at Antioch, and his ready breaking through Jewish restrictions, and then his shrinking back into his old shell again, as soon as 'certain came down from Jerusalem.'

And in it all, he is one of ourselves. We have to learn to distrust all our own resolutions, and to be chary of our vows. 'Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.' So, aware of our own weakness, and the flutterings of our own hearts, let us not mortgage the future, nor lightly say 'I will'—but rather let us turn our vows into prayers,

'Nor confidently say,  
"I never will deny Thee, Lord!"  
But, "Grant I never may."'

Let us note, too, the slight value of even genuine emotion. The very exhaustion following on the strained emotions which these disciples had been experiencing had sent them to sleep. Luke, in his physician-like way, tells us this, when he says that they 'slept for sorrow.' We all know how some great emotion which we might have expected would have held our eyes waking, lulls to slumber. Men sleep soundly on the night before their execution. A widow leaves her husband's deathbed as soon as he has passed away, and sleeps a dreamless sleep for hours. The strong current of emotion sweeps through us, and leaves us dry. Sheer exhaustion and collapse follow its intenser forms. And even in its milder, nothing takes so much out of a man as emotion. Reaction



always follows, and people are in some degree unfitted for sober work by it. Peter, for example, was all the less ready for keeping awake, and for bold confession, because of the vehement emotions which had agitated him in the upper chamber. We have, therefore, to be chary, in our religious life, of feeding the flames of mere feeling. An unemotional Christianity is a very poor thing, and most probably a spurious and unreal thing. But a merely emotional Christianity is closely related to practical unholiness, and leads by a very short straight road to windy wordy insincerity and conscious hypocrisy. Emotion which is firmly based upon an intelligent grasp of God's truth, and which is at once translated into action, is good. But unless these two conditions be rigidly observed, it darkens the understanding and enfeebles the soul.

Lastly, notice how much easier it is to purpose and to do great things than small ones.

I have little doubt that if the Roman soldiers had called on Peter to have made good his boast, and to give up his life to rescue his Master, he would have been ready to do it. We know that he was ready to fight for Him, and in fact did draw a sword and offer resistance. He could die for Him, but he could not keep awake for Him. The great thing he could have done, the little thing he could not do.

Brethren, it is far easier once in a way, by a dead lift, to screw ourselves up to some great crisis which seems worthy of a supreme effort of enthusiasm and sacrifice, than it is to keep on persistently doing the small monotonies of daily duty. Many a soldier will bravely rush to the assault in a storming-party, who would tremble in the trenches. Many a martyr has gone unblenching to the stake for Christ, who had found

it far harder to serve Him in common duties. It is easier to die for Him than to watch with Him. So let us listen to His gentle voice, as He speaks to us, not as of old in the pauses of His agony, and His locks wet with the dews of the night, but bending from His throne, and crowned with many crowns: 'Sleepest thou? Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.'

## THE CAPTIVE CHRIST AND THE CIRCLE ROUND HIM

'And immediately, while He yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. 44. And he that betrayed Him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is He; take Him, and lead Him away safely. 45. And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to Him, and saith, Master, Master; and kissed Him. 46. And they laid their hands on Him, and took Him. 47. And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. 48. And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take Me? 49. I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took Me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled. 50. And they all forsook Him, and fled. 51. And there followed Him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young man laid hold on Him: 52. And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked. 53. And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes. 54. And Peter followed Him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire.'—MARK xiv. 43-54.

A COMPARISON of the three first Gospels in this section shows a degree of similarity, often verbal, which is best accounted for by supposing that a common (oral?) 'Gospel,' which had become traditionally fixed by frequent and long repetition, underlies them all. Mark's account is briefest, and grasps with sure instinct the essential points; but, even in his brevity, he pauses to tell of the young man who so nearly shared the Lord's apprehension. The canvas is narrow and crowded; but we may see unity in the picture, if we regard as the central fact the sacrilegious seizure of Jesus, and the other incidents and persons as grouped round it and Him, and reflecting various moods of men's feelings towards Him.

I. The avowed and hypocritical enemies of incarnate love. Again we have Mark's favourite 'straightway,' so frequent in the beginning of the Gospel, and occurring twice here, vividly painting both the sudden inburst of

the crowd which interrupted Christ's words and broke the holy silence of the garden, and Judas's swift kiss. He is named—the only name but our Lord's in the section; and the depth of his sin is emphasised by adding 'one of the twelve.' He is not named in the next verse, but gibbeted for immortal infamy by the designation, 'he that betrayed Him.' There is no dilating on his crime, nor any bespattering him with epithets. The passionless narrative tells of the criminal and his crime with unsparing, unmoved tones, which have caught some echo beforehand of the Judge's voice. To name the sinner, and to state without cloak or periphrasis what his deed really was, is condemnation enough. Which of us could stand it?

Judas was foremost of the crowd. What did he feel as he passed swiftly into the shadow of the olives, and caught the first sight of Jesus? That the black depths of his spirit were agitated is plain from two things—the quick kiss, and the nauseous repetition of it. Mark says, 'Straightway . . . he kissed Him much.' Probably the swiftness and vehemence, so graphically expressed by these two touches, were due, not only to fear lest Christ should escape, and to hypocrisy overacting its part, but to a struggle with conscience and ancient affection, and a fierce determination to do the thing and have it over. Judas is not the only man who has tried to drown conscience by hurrying into and reiterating the sin from which conscience tries to keep him. The very extravagances of evil betray the divided and stormy spirit of the doer. In the darkness and confusion, the kiss was a surer token than a word or a pointing finger would have been; and simple convenience appears to have led to its selection. But what a long course of hypocrisy must have preceded,

and how complete the alienation of heart must have become, before such a choice was possible! That traitor's kiss has become a symbol for all treachery cloaked in the garb of affection. Its lessons and warnings are obvious, but this other may be added—that such audacity and nauseousness of hypocrisy is not reached at a leap, but presupposes long underground tunnels of insincere discipleship, through which a man has burrowed, unseen by others, and perhaps unsuspected by himself. Much hypocrisy of the unconscious sort precedes the deliberate and conscious.

How much less criminal and disgusting was the rude crowd at Judas's heels! Most of them were mere passive tools. The Evangelist points beyond them to the greater criminals by his careful enumeration of all classes of the Jewish authorities, thus laying the responsibility directly on their shoulders, and indirectly on the nation whom they represented. The tumultuous character of the crowd is shown by calling them 'a multitude,' and by the medley of weapons which they carried. Half-ignorant hatred, which had had ample opportunities of becoming knowledge and love, offended formalism, blind obedience to ecclesiastical superiors, the dislike of goodness—these impelled the rabble who burst into the garden of Gethsemane.

II. Incarnate love, bound and patient. We may bring together verses 46, 48, and 49, the first of which tells in simplest, briefest words the sacrilegious violence done to Jesus, while the others record His calm remonstrance. 'They laid hands on Him.' That was the first stage in outrage—the quick stretching of many hands to secure the unresisting prisoner. They 'took Him,' or, as perhaps we might better render, 'They held Him fast,' as would have been done with any prisoner. Surely,

the quietest way of telling that stupendous fact is the best! It is easy to exclaim, and, after the fashion of some popular writers of lives of Christ, to paint fancy pictures. It is better to be sparing of words, like Mark, and silently to meditate on the patient long-suffering of the love which submitted to these indignities, and on the blindness which had no welcome but this for 'God manifest in the flesh.' Both are in full operation to-day, and the germs of the latter are in us all.

Mark confines himself to that one of Christ's sayings which sets in the clearest light His innocence and meek submissiveness. With all its calmness and patience, it is majestic and authoritative, and sounds as if spoken from a height far above the hubbub. Its question is not only an assertion of His innocence, and therefore of his captor's guilt, but also declares the impotence of force as against Him—'Swords and staves to take Me!' All that parade of arms was out of place, for He was no evil-doer; needless, for He did not resist; and powerless, unless He chose to let them prevail. He speaks as the stainless, incarnate Son of God. He speaks also as Captain of 'the noble army of martyrs,' and His question may be extended to include the truth that force is in its place when used against crime, but ludicrously and tragically out of place when employed against any teacher, and especially against Christianity. Christ, in His persecuted confessions, puts the same question to the persecutors which Christ in the flesh put to His captors.

The second clause of Christ's remonstrance appeals to their knowledge of Him and His words, and to their attitude towards Him. For several days He had daily been publicly teaching in the Temple. They had laid no hands on Him. Nay, some of them, no doubt, had

helped to wave the palm-branches and swell the hosannas. He does not put the contrast of then and now in its strongest form, but spares them, even while He says enough to bring an unseen blush to some cheeks. He would have them ask, 'Why this change in us, since He is the same? Did He deserve to be hailed as King a few short hours ago? How, then, before the palm-branches are withered, can He deserve rude hands?' Men change in their feelings to the unchanging Christ; and they who have most closely marked the rise and fall of the tide in their own hearts will be the last to wonder at Christ's captors, and will most appreciate the gentleness of His rebuke and remonstrance.

The third clause rises beyond all notice of the human agents, and soars to the divine purpose which wrought itself out through them. That divine purpose does not make them guiltless, but it makes Jesus submissive. He bows utterly, and with no reluctance, to the Father's will, which could be wrought out through unconscious instruments, and had been declared of old by half-understanding prophets, but needed the obedience of the Son to be clear-seeing, cheerful, and complete. We, too, should train ourselves to see the hand that moves the pieces, and to make God's will our will, as becomes sons. Then Christ's calm will be ours, and, ceasing from self, and conscious of God everywhere, and yielding our wills, which are the self of ourselves, to Him, we shall enter into rest.

III. Rash love defending its Lord with wrong weapons (verse 47). Peter may have felt that he must do something to vindicate his recent boasting, and, with his usual headlong haste, stops neither to ask what good his sword is likely to do, nor to pick his man and take deliberate aim at him. If swords were to be used, they

should do something more effectual than hacking off a poor servant's ear. There was love in the foolish deed, and a certain heroism in braving the chance of a return thrust or capture, which should go to Peter's credit. If he alone struck a blow for his Master, it was because the others were more cowardly, not more enlightened. Peter has had rather hard measure about this matter, and is condemned by some of us who would not venture a tenth part of what he ventured for his Lord then. No doubt, this was blind and blundering love, with an alloy of rashness and wish for prominence; but that is better than unloving enlightenment and caution, which is chiefly solicitous about keeping its own ears on. It is also worse than love which sees and reflects the image of the meek Sufferer whom it loves. Christ and His cause are to be defended by other weapons. Christian heroism endures and does not smite. Not only swords, but bitter words which wound worse than they, are forbidden to Christ's soldier. We are ever being tempted to fight Christ's battles with the world's weapons; and many a 'defender of the faith' in later days, perhaps even in this very enlightened day, has repeated Peter's fault with less excuse than he, and with very little of either his courage or his love.

IV. Cowardly love forsaking its Lord (verse 50). 'They all forsook Him, and fled.' And who will venture to say that he would not have done so too? The tree that can stand such a blast must have deep roots. The Christ whom they forsook was, to them, but a fragment of the Christ whom we know; and the fear which scattered them was far better founded and more powerful than anything which the easy-going Christians of to-day have to resist. Their flight may teach us to place little reliance on our emotions, however



genuine and deep, and to look for the security for our continual adherence to Christ, not to our fluctuating feelings, but to His steadfast love. We keep close to Him, not because our poor fingers grasp His hand—for that grasp is always feeble, and often relaxed—but because His strong and gentle hand holds us with a grasp which nothing can loosen. Whoso trusts in his own love to Christ builds on sand, but whoso trusts in Christ's love to him builds on rock.

V. Adventurous curiosity put to flight (verses 51, 52). Probably this young man was Mark. Only he tells the incident, which has no bearing on the course of events, and was of no importance but to the person concerned. He has put himself unnamed in a corner of his picture, as monkish painters used to do, content to associate himself even thus with his Lord. His hastily cast-on covering seems to show that he had been roused from sleep. Mingled love and curiosity and youthful adventurousness made him bold to follow when Apostles had fled. No effort appears to have been made to stop their flight; but he is laid hold of, and, terrified at his own rashness, wriggles himself out of his captors' hands. The whole incident singularly recalls Mark's behaviour on Paul's first missionary journey. There are the same adventurousness, the same inconsiderate entrance on perilous paths, the same ignominious and hasty retreat at the first whistle of the bullets. A man who pushes himself needlessly into difficulties and dangers without estimating their force is pretty sure to take to his heels as soon as he feels them, and to cut as undignified a figure as this naked fugitive.

VI. Love frightened, but following (verse 54). Fear had driven Peter but a little way. Love soon drew him and John back. Sudden and often opposite

impulses moved his conduct and ruffled the surface of his character, but, deep down, the core was loyal love. He followed, but afar off: though 'afar off,' he did follow. If his distance betrayed his terror, his following witnessed his bravery. He is not a coward who is afraid, but he who lets his fear hinder him from duty or drive him to flight. What is all Christian living but following Christ afar off? And do the best of us do more, though we have less apology for our distance than Peter had? 'Leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps,' said he, long after, perhaps remembering both that morning and the other by the lake when he was bidden to leave other servants' tasks to the Master's disposal, and, for his own part, to follow Him.

His love pushed him into a dangerous place. He was in bad company among the inferior sort of servants huddled around the fire that cold morning, at the lower end of the hall; and as its light flickered on his face, he was sure to be recognised. But we have not now to do with his denial. Rather he is the type of a true disciple, coercing his human weakness and cowardice to yield to the attraction which draws him to his Lord, and restful in the humblest place where he can catch a glimpse of His face, and so be, as he long after alleged it as his chief title to authority to have been, 'a witness of the sufferings of Christ.'

## THE CONDEMNATION WHICH CONDEMNS THE JUDGES

And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put Him to death; and found none. 56. For many bare false witness against Him, but their witness agreed not together. 57. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against Him, saying, 58. We heard Him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. 59. But neither so did their witness agree together. 60. And the high priest stood up in their midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest Thou nothing? what is it which these witness against Thee? 61. But He held His peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, and said unto Him, Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? 62. And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of Man, sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. 63. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? 64. Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned Him to be guilty of death. 65. And some began to spit on Him, and to cover His face, and to buffet Him, and to say unto Him, Prophecy: and the servants did strike Him with the palms of their hands.'—MARK xiv. 55-65.

MARK brings out three stages in our Lord's trial by the Jewish authorities—their vain attempts to find evidence against Him, which were met by His silence; His own majestic witness to Himself, which was met by a unanimous shriek of condemnation; and the rude and mockery of the underlings. The other Evangelists especially John, supply many illuminative details, as but the essentials are here. It is only in criticism of the Gospels that a summary and a fuller narrative are dealt with as contradictory. These three stages naturally divide this paragraph. knew to

I. The judges with evil thoughts, the false witness solemn and the silent Christ (verses 55-61). The criminal has been condemned before He is tried. The judges have now they up their minds before they sit, and the Sanhedrin, that not a court of justice, but a slaughter-house, where Christ. murder is to be done under sanction of law, changes like Matthew, notes the unanimity of the council. He says to which Joseph of Arimathea—the one swallow

does not make a summer—appears to have been the only exception; and he probably was absent, or, if present, was silent. He did ‘not consent’; but we are not told that he opposed. That ill-omened unanimity measures the nation’s sin. Flagrant injustice and corruption in high places is possible only when society as a whole is corrupt or indifferent to corruption. This prejudging of a case from hatred of the accused as a destroyer of sacred tradition, and this hunting for evidence to bolster up a foregone conclusion, are pre-eminently the vices of ecclesiastical tribunals and not of Jewish Sanhedrim or Papal Inquisition only. Where judges look for witnesses for the prosecution, plenty will be found, ready to curry favour by lies. The eagerness to find witnesses against Jesus is witness for Him, as showing that nothing in His life or teaching was sufficient to warrant their murderous purpose. His judges condemn themselves in seeking grounds to condemn Him, for they thereby show that their real motive was personal spite, or, as Caiaphas suggested, political expediency.

The single specimen of the worthless evidence given may be either a piece of misunderstanding or of malicious twisting of innocent words; nor can we tell whether the witnesses contradicted one another or not. The former is the more probable, as a fundamental principle of the Jewish law of evidence (‘two or three witnesses’) would, in that case, vitiate the testimony. The saying which they garbled was the very opposite of what they made it mean. They presented Jesus as the restorer of that which they would destroy. It referred to His body which they would destroy; but the symbolic temple ‘made of stones’ is so inseparably connected with the real,

that the fate of the one determines that of the other. Strangely significant, therefore, is it, that the rulers heard again, though distorted, at that moment when *they* were on their trial, the far-reaching sentence, which might have taught them that in slaying Jesus they were throwing down the Temple and all which centred in it, and that by His resurrection, His own act, He would build up again a new polity, which yet was but the old transfigured, even 'the Church, which is His body.' His work destroys nothing but 'the works of the devil.' He is the restorer of the divine ordinances and gifts which men destroy, and His death and resurrection bring back in nobler form all the good things lost by sin, 'the desolations of many generations.' The history of all subsequent attacks on Christ is mirrored here. The foregone conclusion, the evidence sought as an after-thought to give a colourable pretext, the material found by twisting His teaching, the blindness which accuses Him of destroying what He restores, and fancies itself as preserving what it is destroying, have all reappeared over and over again.

Our Lord's silence is not only that of meekness, 'as a sheep before her shearers is dumb.' It is the silence of innocence, and, if we may use the word concerning Him, of scorn. He will not defend Himself to such judges, nor stoop to repel evidence which they knew to be worthless. But there is also something very solemn and judicial in His locked lips. They had ever been ready to open in words of loving wisdom; but now they are fast closed, and this is the penalty for despising, that He ceases to speak. Deaf ears make a dumb Christ. What will happen when Jesus and His judges change places, as they will one day do? When He says to

each, 'Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these, thy sins, witness against thee?' each will be silent with the consciousness of guilt and of just condemnation by His all-knowing justice.

II. Christ's majestic witness to Himself received with a shriek of condemnation. What a supreme moment that was when the head of the hierarchy put this question and received the unambiguous answer! The veriest impostor asserting Messiahship had a right to have his claims examined; but a howl of hypocritical horror is all which Christ's evoke. The high priest knew well enough what Christ's answer would be. Why, then, did he not begin by questioning Jesus, and do without the witnesses? Probably because the council wished to find some pretext for His condemnation without bringing up the real reason; for it looked ugly to condemn a man for claiming to be Messiah, and to do it without examining His credentials. The failure, however, of the false witnesses compelled the council to 'show their hands,' and to hear and reject our Lord solemnly and, so to speak, officially, laying His assertion of dignity and office before them, as the tribunal charged with the duty of examining His proofs. The question is so definite as to imply a pretty full and accurate knowledge of our Lord's teaching about Himself. It embraces two points—office and nature; for 'the Christ' and 'the Son of the Blessed' are not equivalents. The latter title points to our Lord's declarations that He was the Son of God, and is an instance of the later Jewish superstition which avoided using the divine name. Loving faith delights in the name of the Lord. Dead formalism changes reverence into dread, and will not speak it.

Sham reverence, feigned ignorance, affected wish

for information, the false show of judicial impartiality, and other lies and vices not a few, are condensed in the question; and the fact that the judge had to ask it and hear the answer, is an instance of a divine purpose working through evil men, and compelling reluctant lips to speak words the meaning and bearing of which they little know. Jesus could not leave such a challenge unanswered. Silence *then* would have been abandonment of His claims. It was fitting that the representatives of the nation should, at that decisive moment, hear Him declare Himself Messiah. It was not fitting that He should be condemned on any other ground. In that answer, and its reception by the council, the nation's rejection of Jesus is, as it were, focused and compressed. This was the end of centuries of training by miracle, prophet and psalmist—the saddest instance in man's long, sad history of his awful power to frustrate God's patient educating!

Our Lord's majestic 'I am,' in one word answers both parts of the question, and then passes on, with strange calm and dignity, to point onwards to the time when the criminal will be the judge, and the judges will stand at His bar. 'The Son of Man,' His ordinary designation of Himself, implies His true manhood, and His representative character, as perfect man, or, to use modern language, the 'realised ideal' of humanity. In the present connection, its employment in the same sentence as His assertion that He is the Son of God goes deep into the mystery of His twofold nature, and declares that His manhood had a supernatural origin and wielded divine prerogatives. Accordingly there follows the explicit prediction of His assumption of the highest of these after His death. The Cross was as plain to Him as ever; but beyond it gleamed the crown and the

throne. He anticipates 'sitting on the right hand of power,' which implies repose, enthronement, judicature, investiture with omnipotence, and administration of the universe. He anticipates 'coming in the clouds of heaven,' which distinctly claims to be the future Judge of the world. His hearers could scarcely fail to discern the reference to Daniel's prophecy.

Was ever the irony of history more pungently exemplified than in an Annas and Caiaphas holding up hands of horror at the 'blasphemies' of Jesus? They rightly took His words to mean more than the claim of Messiahship as popularly understood. To say that He was the Christ was not 'blasphemy,' but a claim demanding examination; but to say that He, the Son of Man, was Son of God and supreme Judge was so, according to their canons. How unconsciously the exclamation, 'What need we further witnesses?' betrays the purpose for which the witnesses had been sought, as being simply His condemnation! They were 'needed' to compass His death, which the council now gleefully feels to be secured. So with precipitate unanimity they vote. And this was Israel's welcome to their King, and the outcome of all their history! And it was the destruction of the national life. That howl of condemnation pronounced sentence on themselves and on the whole order of which they were the heads. The prisoner's eyes alone saw then what we and all men may see now—the handwriting on the wall of the high priest's palace: 'Weighed in the balance, and found wanting.'

III. The savage mockers and the patient Christ (verse 65). There is an evident antithesis between the 'all' of verse 64 and the 'some' of verse 65, which shows that the inflictors of the indignities were certain



members of the council, whose fury carried them beyond all bounds of decency. The subsequent mention of the 'servants' confirms this, especially when we adopt the more accurate rendering of the Revised Version, 'received Him with blows.' Mark's account, then, is this: that, as soon as the unanimous howl of condemnation had been uttered, some of the 'judges' (!) fell upon Jesus with spitting and clumsy ridicule and downright violence, and that afterwards He was handed over to the underlings, who were not slow to copy the example set them at the upper end of the hall.

It was not an ignorant mob who thus answered His claims, but the leaders and teachers—the *crème de la crème* of the nation. A wild beast lurks below the Pharisee's long robes and phylacteries; and the more that men have changed a living belief in religion for a formal profession, the more fiercely antagonistic are they to every attempt to realise its precepts and hopes. The 'religious' men who mock Jesus in the name of traditional religion are by no means an extinct species. It is of little use to shudder at the blind cruelty of dead scribes and priests. Let us rather remember that the seeds of their sins are in us all, and take care to check their growth. What a volcano of hellish passion bursts out here! Spitting expresses disgust; blinding and asking for the names of the smiters is a clumsy attempt at wit and ridicule; buffeting is the last unrestrained form of hate and malice. The world has always paid its teachers and benefactors in such coin; but all other examples pale before this saddest, transcendent instance. Love is repaid by hate; a whole nation is blind to supreme and unspotted goodness; teachers steeped in 'law and prophets' cannot see Him of and for whom law and prophets witnessed and were,

when He stands before them. The sin of sins is the failure to recognise Jesus for what He is. His person and claims are the touchstone which tries every beholder of what sort He is.

How wonderful the silent patience of Jesus! He withholds not His face 'from shame and spitting.' He gives 'His back to the smiters.' Meek endurance and passive submission are not all which we have to behold there. This is more than an uncomplaining martyr. This is the sacrifice for the world's sin; and His bearing of all that men can inflict is more than heroism. It is redeeming love. His sad, loving eyes, wide open below their bandage, saw and pitied each rude smiter, even as He sees us all. They were and are eyes of infinite tenderness, ready to beam forgiveness; but they were and are the eyes of the Judge, who sees and repays His foes, as those who smite Him will one day find out.

## CHRIST AND PILATE: THE TRUE KING AND HIS COUNTERFEIT

'And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried Him away, and delivered Him to Pilate. 2. And Pilate asked Him, Art Thou the King of the Jews? And He answering said unto him, Thou sayest it. 3. And the chief priests accused Him of many things: but He answered nothing. 4. And Pilate asked Him again, saying, Answerest Thou nothing? behold how many things they witness against Thee. 5. But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marvelled. 6. Now at that feast he released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they desired. 7. And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection. 8. And the multitude crying aloud began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them. 9. But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? 10. For he knew that the chief priests had delivered Him for envy. 11. But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them. 12. And Pilate answered and said again unto them, What will ye then that I shall do unto Him whom ye call the King of the Jews? 13. And they cried out again, Crucify Him. 14. Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath He done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify Him. 15. And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged Him, to be crucified. 16. And the soldiers led Him away into the hall, called Prætorium; and they call together the whole band. 17. And they clothed Him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about His head, 18. And began to salute Him, Hail, King of the Jews! 19. And they smote Him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon Him, and bowing their knees worshipped Him. 20. And when they had mocked Him they took off the purple from Him, and put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him.'—MARK xv. 1-20.

THE so-called trial of Jesus by the rulers turned entirely on his claim to be Messiah; His examination by Pilate turns entirely on His claim to be king. The two claims are indeed one, but the political aspect is distinguishable from the higher one; and it was the Jewish rulers' trick to push it exclusively into prominence before Pilate, in the hope that he might see in the claim an incipient insurrection, and might mercilessly stamp it out. It was a new part for them to play to hand over leaders of revolt to the Roman authorities, and a governor with any common sense must have suspected that there was something hid below such unusual loyalty. What a moment of degradation and of treason

against Israel's sacredest hopes that was when its rulers dragged Jesus to Pilate on such a charge! Mark follows the same method of condensation and discarding of all but the essentials, as in the other parts of his narrative. He brings out three points—the hearing before Pilate, the popular vote for Barabbas, and the soldiers' mockery.

I. The true King at the bar of the apparent ruler (verses 1-6). The contrast between appearance and reality was never more strongly drawn than when Jesus stood as a prisoner before Pilate. The One is helpless, bound, alone; the other invested with all the externals of power. But which is the stronger? and in which hand is the sceptre? On the lowest view of the contrast, it is ideas *versus* swords. On the higher and truer, it is the incarnate God, mighty because voluntarily weak, and man 'dressed in a little brief authority,' and weak because insolently 'making his power his god.' Impotence, fancying itself strong, assumes sovereign authority over omnipotence clothed in weakness. The phantom ruler sits in judgment on the true King. Pilate holding Christ's life in his hand is the crowning paradox of history, and the mystery of self-abasing love. One exercise of the Prisoner's will and His chains would have snapped, and the governor lain dead on the marble 'pavement.'

The two hearings are parallel, and yet contrasted. In each there are two stages—the self-attestation of Jesus and the accusations of others; but the order is different. The rulers begin with the witnesses, and, foiled there, fall back on Christ's own answer. Pilate, with Roman directness and a touch of contempt for the accusers, goes straight to the point, and first questions Jesus. His question was simply as to our

Lord's regal pretensions. He cared nothing about Jewish 'superstitions' unless they threatened political disturbance. It was nothing to him whether or no one crazy fanatic more fancied himself 'the Messiah,' whatever that might be. Was He going to fight?—that was all which Pilate had to look after. He is the very type of the hard, practical Roman, with a 'practical' man's contempt for ideas and sentiments, sceptical as to the possibility of getting hold of 'truth,' and too careless to wait for an answer to his question about it; loftily ignorant of and indifferent to the notions of the troublesome people that he ruled, but alive to the necessity of keeping them in good humour, and unscrupulous enough to strain justice and unhesitatingly to sacrifice so small a thing as an innocent life to content them.

What could such a man see in Jesus but a harmless visionary? He had evidently made up his mind that there was no mischief in Him, or he would not have questioned Him as to His kingship. It was a new thing for the rulers to hand over dangerous patriots, and Pilate had experience enough to suspect that such unusual loyalty concealed something else, and that if Jesus had really been an insurrectionary leader, He would never have fallen into Pilate's power. Accordingly, he gives no serious attention to the case, and his question has a certain half-amused, half-pitying ring about it. 'Thou a king?'—poor helpless peasant! A strange specimen of royalty this! How constantly the same blindness is repeated, and the strong things of this world despise the weak, and material power smiles pityingly at the helpless impotence of the principles of Christ's gospel, which yet will one day shatter it to fragments, like a potter's vessel! The phantom ruler judges the real King to be a powerless shadow, while

himself is the shadow and the other the substance. There are plenty of Pilates to-day who judge and mis-judge the King of Israel.

The silence of Jesus in regard to the eager accusations corresponds to His silence before the false witnesses. The same reason dictated both. His silence is His most eloquent answer. It calmly passes by all these charges by envenomed tongues as needing no reply, and as utterly irrelevant. Answered, they would have lived in the Gospels; unanswered, they are buried. Christ can afford to let many of His foes alone. Contradictions and confutations keep slanders and heresies above water, which the law of gravitation would dispose of if they were left alone.

Pilate's wonder might and should have led him further. It should have prompted to further inquiry, and that might have issued in clearer knowledge. It was the little glimmer of light at the far-off end of his cavern, which, travelled towards, might have brought him into free air and broad day. One great part of his crime was neglecting the faint monitions of which he was conscious. His light may have been dim, but it would have brightened; and he quenched it. He stands as a tremendous example of possibilities missed, and of the tragedy of a soul that has looked on Jesus, and has not yielded to the impressions made on him by the sight.

II. The people's favourite (verses 7-15). 'Barabbas' means 'son of the father.' His very name is a kind of caricature of the 'Son of the Blessed,' and his character and actions present in gross form the sort of Messiah whom the nation really wanted. He had headed some one of the many small riots against Rome which were perpetually sputtering up and being trampled out by

an armed heel. There had been bloodshed, in which he had himself taken part ('a murderer,' Acts iii. 14). And this coarse, red-handed desperado is the people's favourite, because he embodied their notions and aspirations, and had been bold enough to do what every man of them would have done if he had dared. He thought and felt, as they did, that freedom was to be won by the sword. The popular hero is as a mirror which reflects the popular mind. He echoes the popular voice, a little improved or exaggerated. Jesus had taught what the people did not care to hear, and given blessings which even the recipients soon forgot, and lived a life whose 'beauty of holiness' oppressed and rebuked the common life of men. What chance had truth and kindness and purity against the sort of bravery that slashes with a sword, and is not elevated above the mob by inconvenient reach of thought or beauty of character? Even now, after nineteen centuries of Christ's influence have modified the popular ideals, what chance have they? Are the popular 'heroes' of Christian nations saints, teachers, lovers of men, in whom their Christ-likeness is the thing venerated? The old saying that the voice of the people is the voice of God receives an instructive commentary in the vote for Barabbas and against Jesus. That was what a plebiscite for the discovery of the people's favourite came to. What a reliable method of finding the best man universal suffrage, manipulated by wire-pullers like these priests, is! and how wise the people are who let it guide their judgments, or still wiser, who fret their lives out in angling for its approval! Better be condemned with Jesus than adopted with Barabbas.

That fatal choice revealed the character of the

choosers, both in their hostility and admiration; for excellence hated shows what we ought to be and are not, and grossness or vice admired shows what we would fain be if we dared. It was the tragic sign that Israel had not learned the rudiments of the lesson which 'at sundry times and in divers manners' God had been teaching them. In it the nation renounced its Messianic hopes, and with its own mouth pronounced its own sentence. It convicted them of insensibility to the highest truth, of blindness to the most effulgent light, of ingratitude for the richest gifts. It is the supreme instance of short-lived, unintelligent emotion, inasmuch as many who on Friday joined in the roar, 'Crucify Him!' had on Sunday shouted 'Hosanna!' till they were hoarse.

Pilate plays a cowardly and unrighteous part in the affair, and tries to make amends to himself for his politic surrender of a man whom he knew to be innocent, by taunts and sarcasm. He seems to see a chance to release Jesus, if he can persuade the mob to name Him as the prisoner to be set free, according to custom. His first proposal to them was apparently dictated by a genuine interest in Jesus, and a complete conviction that Rome had nothing to fear from this 'King.' But there are also in the question a sneer at such pauper royalty, as it looked to him, and a kind of scornful condescension in acknowledging the mob's right of choice. He consults their wishes for once, but there is haughty consciousness of mastery in his way of doing it. His appeal is to the people, as against the priests whose motives he had penetrated. But in his very effort to save Jesus he condemns himself; for, if he knew that they had delivered Christ for envy, his plain duty was to set the prisoner free, as innocent of



the only crime of which he ought to take cognisance. So his attempt to shift the responsibility off his own shoulders is a piece of cowardice and a dereliction of duty. His second question plunges him deeper in the mire. The people had a right to decide which was to be released, but none to settle the fate of Jesus. To put that in their hands was an unconditional surrender by Pilate, and the sneer in 'whom *ye* call the King of the Jews' is a poor attempt to hide from them and himself that he is afraid of them. Mark puts his finger on the damning blot in Pilate's conduct when he says that his motive for condemning Jesus was his wish to content the people. The life of one poor Jew was a small price to pay for popularity. So he let policy outweigh righteousness, and, in spite of his own clear conviction, did an innocent man to death. That would be his reading of his act, and, doubtless, it did not trouble his conscience much or long, but he would leave the judgment-seat tolerably satisfied with his morning's work. How little he knew what he had done! In his ignorance lies his palliation. His crime was great, but his guilt is to be measured by his light, and that was small. He prostituted justice for his own ends, and he did not follow out the dawnings of light that would have led him to know Jesus. Therefore he did the most awful thing in the world's history. Let us learn the lesson which he teaches!

III. The soldiers' mockery (verses 16-20). This is characteristically different from that of the rulers, who jeered at His claim to supernatural enlightenment, and bade Him show His Messiahship by naming His smiters. The rough legionaries knew nothing about a Messiah, but it seemed to them a good jest that this poor, scourged prisoner should have called Himself

a King, and so they proceed to make coarse and clumsy merriment over it. It is like the wild beast playing with its prey before killing it. The laughter is not only rough, but cruel. There was no pity for the Victim 'bleeding from the Roman rods,' and soon to die. And the absence of any personal hatred made this mockery more hideous. Jesus was nothing to them but a prisoner whom they were to crucify, and their mockery was sheer brutality and savage delight in torturing. The sport is too good to be kept by a few, so the whole band is gathered to enjoy it. How they would troop to the place! They get hold of some robe or cloth of the imperial colour, and of some flexible shoots of some thorny plant, and out of these they fashion a burlesque of royal trappings. Then they shout, as they would have done to Cæsar, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' repeating again with clumsy iteration the stale jest which seems to them so exquisite. Then their mood changes, and naked ferocity takes the place of ironical reverence. Plucking the mock sceptre, the reed, from His passive hand, they strike the thorn-crowned Head with it, and spit on Him, while they bow in mock reverence before Him, and at last, when tired of their sport, tear off the purple, and lead him away to the Cross.

If we think of who He was who bore all this, and of why He bore it, we may well bow not the knee but the heart, in endless love and thankfulness. If we think of the mockers—rude Roman soldiers, who probably could not understand a word of what they heard on the streets of Jerusalem—we shall do rightly to remember our Lord's own plea for them, 'they know not what they do,' and reflect that many of us with more knowledge do really sin more against the King

than they did. Their insult was an unconscious prophecy. They foretold the basis of His dominion by the crown of thorns, and its character by the sceptre of reed, and its extent by their mocking salutations; for His Kingship is founded in suffering, wielded with gentleness, and to Him every knee shall one day bow, and every tongue confess that the King of the Jews is monarch of mankind.

## THE DEATH WHICH GIVES LIFE

'And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear His cross. 22. And they bring Him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull. 23. And they gave Him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but He received it not. 24. And when they had crucified Him, they parted His garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take. 25. And it was the third hour, and they crucified Him. 26. And the superscription of His accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS. 27. And with Him they crucify two thieves; the one on His right hand, and the other on His left. 28. And the Scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And He was numbered with the transgressors. 29. And they that passed by railed on Him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, 30. Save Thyself, and come down from the cross. 31. Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; Himself He cannot save. 32. Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with Him reviled Him. 33. And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. 34. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? 35. And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, He calleth Elias. 36. And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take Him down. 37. And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. 38. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. 39. And when the centurion, which stood over against Him, saw that He so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.'—MARK xv. 21-39.

THE narrative of the crucifixion is, in Mark's hands, almost entirely a record of what was done to Jesus, and scarcely touches what was done by Him. We are shown the executioners, the jeering rabble, the triumphant priests, the fellow-sufferers reviling; but the only glimpses we get of Him are His refusal of the stupefying draught, His loud cries, and His giving up the ghost. The narrative is perfectly calm, as well as reverently reticent. It would have been well if our religious literature had copied the example, and treated the solemn scene in the same fashion. Mark's inartificial style of linking long paragraphs with the simple 'and' is peculiarly observable here, where every verse

but vv. 30 and 32, which are both quotations, begins with it. The whole section is one long sentence, each member of which adds a fresh touch to the tragic picture. The monotonous repetition of 'and,' 'and,' 'and,' gives the effect of an endless succession of the waves of sorrow, pain, and contumely which broke over that sacred head. We shall do best simply to note each billow as it breaks.

The first point is the impressing of Simon to bear the Cross. That was not dictated by compassion so much as by impatience. Apparently the weight was too heavy for Jesus, and the pace could be quickened by making the first man who could be laid hold of help to carry the load. Mark adds that Simon was the 'father of Alexander and Rufus,' whom he supposes to need no introduction to his readers. There is a Rufus mentioned in Romans xvi. 13 as being, with his mother, members of the Roman Church. Mark's Gospel has many traces of being primarily intended for Romans. Possibly these two Rufuses are the same; and the conjecture may be allowable that the father's fortuitous association with the crucifixion led to the conversion of himself and his family, and that his sons were of more importance or fame in the Church than he was. Perhaps, too, he is the 'Simeon called Niger' (bronzed by the hot African sun) who was a prophet of Antioch, and stands by the side of a Cyrenian (Acts xiii. 1). It is singular that he should be the only one of all the actors in the crucifixion who is named; and the fact suggests his subsequent connection with the Church. If so, the seeking love of God found him by a strange way. On what apparently trivial accidents a life may be pivoted, and how much may depend on turning to right or left in a walk! In this bewildering network

of interlaced events, which each ramifies in so many directions, the only safety is to keep fast hold of God's hand, and to take good care of the purity of our motives, and let results alone.

The next verse brings us to Golgotha, which is translated by the three Evangelists, who give it as meaning 'the place of a skull.' The name may have been given to the place of execution with grim suggestiveness; or, more probably, Conder's suggested identification is plausible, which points to a little, rounded, skull-shaped knoll, close outside the northern wall, as the site of the crucifixion. In that case, the name would originally describe the form of the height, and be retained as specially significant in view of its use as the place of execution. That was the 'place' to which Israel led its King! The place of death becomes a place of life, and from the mournful soil where the bones of evil-doers lay bleaching in the sun springs the fountain of water of life.

Arrived at that doleful place, a small touch of kindness breaks the monotony of cruelty, if it be not merely a part of the ordinary routine of executions. The stupefying potion would diminish, but would therefore protract, the pain, and was possibly given for the latter rather than the former effect. But Jesus 'received it not.' He will not, by any act of His, lessen the bitterness. He will drink to the dregs the cup which His Father hath given Him, and therefore He will not drink of the numbing draught. It is a small matter comparatively, but it is all of a piece with the greater things. The spirit of His whole course of voluntary, cheerful endurance of all the sorrows needful to redeem the world, is expressed in His silent turning away from the draught which might have alleviated physical

suffering, but at the cost of dulling conscious surrender.

The act of crucifixion is but named in a subsidiary clause, as if the writer turned away, with eyes veiled in reverence, from the sight of man's utmost sin and Christ's utmost mystery of suffering love. He can describe the attendant circumstances, but his pen refuses to dwell upon the central fact. The highest art and the simplest natural feeling both know that the fewest words are the most eloquent. He will not expressly mention the indignity done to the sacred Body in which 'dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead,' but leaves it to be inferred from the parting of Christ's raiment, the executioner's perquisite. He had nothing else belonging to Him, and of even that poor property He is spoiled. According to John's more detailed account, the soldiers made an equal parting of His garments except the seamless robe, for which they threw lots. So the 'parting' applies to one portion, and the 'casting lots' to another. The incident teaches two things: on the one hand, the stolid indifference of the soldiers, who had crucified many a Jew, and went about their awful work as a mere piece of routine duty; and, on the other hand, the depth of the abasement and shame to which Jesus bowed for our sakes. 'Naked shall I return thither' was true in the most literal sense of Him whose earthly life began with His laying aside His garments of divine glory, and ended with rude legionaries parting 'His raiment' among them.

Mark alone tells the hour at which Jesus was nailed to the Cross (verse 25). Matthew and Luke specify the sixth and ninth hours as the times of the darkness and of the death; but to Mark we owe our knowledge of

the fact that for six slow hours Jesus hung there, tasting death drop by drop. At any moment of all these sorrow-laden moments He could have come down from the Cross, if He would. At each, a fresh exercise of His loving will to redeem kept Him there.

The writing on the Cross is given here in the most condensed fashion (verse 26). The one important point is that His 'accusation' was—'King of the Jews.' It was the official statement of the reason for His crucifixion, put there by Pilate as a double-barrelled sarcasm, hitting both Jesus and the nation. The rulers winced under the taunt, and tried to get it softened; but Pilate sought to make up for his unrighteous facility in yielding Jesus to death, by obstinacy and jeers. So the inscription hung there, a truth deeper than its author or its angry readers knew, and a prophecy which has not received all its fulfilment yet.

The narrative comes back, in verse 27, to the sad catalogue of the insults heaped on Jesus. Verse 28 is probably spurious here, as the Revised Version takes it to be; but it truly expresses the intention of the crucifixion of the thieves as being to put Him in the same class as they, and to suggest that He was a ringleader, pre-eminent in evil. Possibly the two robbers may have been part of Barabbas' band, who had been brigands disguised as patriots; and, if so, the insult was all the greater. But, in any case, the meaning of it was to bring Him down, in the eyes of beholders, to the level of vulgar criminals. If a Cranmer or a Latimer had been bound to the stake with a house-breaker or a cut-throat, that would have been a feeble image of the malicious contumely thus flung at Jesus; but His love had identified Him with the worst sinners in a far deeper and more real way, and not a



crime had stained these men's hands, but its weight pressed on Him. He numbered Himself with transgressors, that they may be numbered with His saints.

Then follows (verses 29-32) the threefold mockery by people, priests, and fellow-sufferers. That is spread over three hours, and is all which Mark has to tell of them. Other Evangelists give us words spoken by Jesus; but this narrative has only one of the seven words from the Cross, and gives us the picture rather of the silent Sufferer, bearing in meek resolution all that men can lay on Him. Both pictures are true, for the words are too few to make notable breaches in the silence. The mockery harps on the old themes, and witnesses at once the malicious cruelty of the mockers and the innocence of the Victim, at whom even such malice could find nothing to fling except these stale taunts. The chance passengers, of whom there would be a stream to and from the adjacent city gate, 'wag their heads' in gratified and fierce hate. The calumny of the discredited witnesses, although even the biased judges had not dared to treat it as true, has lodged in the popular mind, and been accepted as proved. Lies are not killed when they are shown to be lies. They travel faster than truth. Ears were greedily open for the false witnesses' evidence which had been closed to Christ's gracious teaching. The charge that He was a would-be destroyer of the Temple obliterated all remembrance of miracles and benefits, and fanned the fire of hatred in men whose zeal for the Temple was a substitute for religion. Are there any of them left nowadays—people who have no real heart-hold of Christianity, but are fiercely antagonistic to supposed destroyers of its externals, and not over-particular to

the evidence against them? These mockers thought that Christ's being fastened to the Cross was a *reductio ad absurdum* of His claim to build the Temple. How little they knew that it led straight to that rebuilding, or that they, and not He, were indeed the destroyers of the holy house which they thought that they were honouring, and were really making 'desolate'!

The priests do not take up the people's mockery, for they know that it is based upon a falsehood; but they scoff at His miracles, which they assume to be disproved by His crucifixion. Their venomous gibe is profoundly true, and goes to the very heart of the gospel. Precisely because 'He saved others,' therefore 'Himself He cannot save'—not, as they thought, for want of power, but because His will was fixed to obey the Father and to redeem His brethren, and therefore He must die and cannot deliver Himself. But the necessity and inability both depend on His will. The priests, however, take up the other part of the people's scoff. They unite the two grounds of condemnation in the names 'the Christ, the King of Israel,' and think that both are disproved by His hanging there. But the Cross is the throne of the King. A sacrificial death is the true work of the Messiah of law, prophecy, and psalm; and because He did not come down from the Cross, therefore is He 'crowned with glory and honour' in heaven, and rules over grateful and redeemed hearts on earth.

The midday darkness lasted three hours, during which no word or incident is recorded. It was nature divinely draped in mourning over the sin of sins, the most tragic of deaths. It was a symbol of the eclipse of the Light of the world; but ere He died it passed, and the sun shone on His expiring head, in token that

His death scattered our darkness and poured day on our sad night. The solemn silence was broken at last by that loud cry, the utterance of strangely blended consciousness of possession of God and of abandonment by Him, the depths of which we can never fathom. But this we know: that our sins, not His, wove the veil which separated Him from His God. Such separation is the real death. Where cold analysis is out of place, reverent gratitude may draw near. Let us adore, for what we can understand speaks of a love which has taken on itself the iniquity of us all. Let us silently adore, for all words are weaker than that mystery of love.

The first hearers of that cry misunderstood it, or cruelly pretended to do so, in order to find fresh food for mockery. 'Eloi' sounded like enough to 'Elijah' to suggest to some of the flinty hearts around a travesty of the piteous appeal. They must have been Jews, for the soldiers knew nothing about the prophet; and if they were Scribes, they could scarcely fail to recognise the reference to the Twenty-second Psalm, and to understand the cry. But the opportunity for one more cruelty was too tempting to be resisted, and savage laughter was man's response to the most pitiful prayer ever uttered. One man in all that crowd had a small touch of human pity, and, dipping a sponge in the sour drink provided for the soldiers, reached it up to the parched lips. That was no stupefying draught, and was accepted. Matthew's account is more detailed, and represents the words spoken as intended to hinder even that solitary bit of kindness.

The end was near. The lips, moistened by the 'vinegar,' opened once more in that loud cry which both showed undiminished vitality and conscious vic-

tory; and then He 'gave up the ghost,' *sending away* His spirit, and dying, not because the prolonged agony had exhausted His energy, but because He chose to die. He entered through the gate of death as a conqueror, and burst its bars when He went in, and not only when He came out.

His death rent the Temple veil. The innermost chamber of the Divine Presence is open now, and sinful men have 'access with confidence by the faith of Him,' to every place whither He has gone before. Right into the secret of God's pavilion we can go, now and here, knowledge and faith and love treading the path which Jesus has opened, and coming to the Father by Him. Right into the blaze of the glory we shall go hereafter; for He has gone to prepare a place for us, and when He overcame the sharpness of death He opened the gate of heaven to all believers.

Jews looked on, unconcerned and unconvinced by the pathos and triumph of such a death. But the rough soldier who commanded the executioners had no prejudices or hatred to blind his eyes and ossify his heart. The sight made its natural impression on him; and his exclamation, though not to be taken as a Christian confession or as using the phrase 'Son of God' in its deepest meaning, is yet the beginning of light. Perhaps, as he went thoughtfully to his barrack that afternoon, the process began which led him at last to repeat his first exclamation with deepened meaning and true faith. May we all gaze on that Cross, with fuller knowledge, with firm trust, and endless love!

## SIMON THE CYRENIAN

'And they compel one Simon, a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear His Cross.'—MARK xv. 21.

How little these soldiers knew that they were making this man immortal! What a strange fate that is which has befallen those persons in the Gospel narrative, who for an instant came into contact with Jesus Christ. Like ships passing athwart the white ghost-like splendour of moonlight on the sea, they gleam silvery pure for a moment as they cross its broad belt, and then are swallowed up again in the darkness.

This man Simon, fortuitously, as men say, meeting the little procession at the gate of the city, for an instant is caught in the radiance of the light, and stands out visible for evermore to all the world; and then sinks into the blackness, and we know no more about him. This brief glimpse tells us very little, and yet the man and his act and its consequences may be worth thinking about.

He was a Cyrenian; that is, he was a Jew by descent, probably born, and certainly resident, for purposes of commerce, in Cyrene, on the North African coast of the Mediterranean. No doubt he had come up to Jerusalem for the Passover; and like very many of the strangers who flocked to the Holy City for the feast, met some difficulty in finding accommodation in the city, and so was obliged to go to lodge in one of the outlying villages. From this lodging he is coming in, in the morning, knowing nothing about Christ nor His trial, knowing nothing of what he is about to meet, and happens to see the procession as it is passing out

of the gate. He is by the centurion impressed to help the fainting Christ to carry the heavy Cross. He probably thought Jesus a common criminal, and would resent the task laid upon him by the rough authority of the officer in command. But he was gradually touched into some kind of sympathy; drawn closer and closer, as we suppose, as he looked upon this dying meekness; and at last, yielded to the soul-conquering power of Christ.

Tradition says so, and the reasons for supposing that it was right may be very simply stated. The description of him in our text as 'the father of Alexander and Rufus' shows that, by the time when Mark wrote, his two sons were members of the Christian community, and had attained some eminence in it. A Rufus is mentioned in the salutations in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, as being 'elect in the Lord,' that is to say, 'eminent,' and his mother is associated in the greeting, and commended as having been motherly to Paul as well as to Rufus. Now, if we remember that Mark's Gospel was probably written in Rome, and for Roman Christians, the conjecture seems a very reasonable one that the Rufus here was the Rufus of the Epistle to the Romans. If so, it would seem that the family had been gathered into the fold of the Church, and in all probability, therefore, the father with them.

Then there is another little morsel of possible evidence which may just be noticed. We find in the Acts of the Apostles, in the list of the prophets and teachers in the Church at Antioch, a 'Simon, who is called Niger' (that is, black, the hot African sun having tanned his countenance, perhaps), and side by side with him one 'Lucius of Cyrene,' from which place we know that several of the original brave preachers to the Gentiles in Antioch came. It is possible that this

may be our Simon, and that he who was the last to join the band of disciples during the Master's life and learned courage at the Cross was among the first to apprehend the world-wide destination of the Gospel, and to bear it beyond the narrow bounds of his nation.

At all events, I think we may, with something like confidence, believe that his glimpse of Christ on that morning and his contact with the suffering Saviour ended in his acceptance of Him as his Christ, and in his bearing in a truer sense the Cross after Him.

And so I seek now to gather some of the lessons that seem to me to arise from this incident.

I. First, the greatness of trifles. If Simon had started from the little village where he lodged five minutes earlier or later, if he had walked a little faster or slower, if he had happened to be lodging on the other side of Jerusalem, or if the whim had taken him to go in at another gate, or if the centurion's eye had not chanced to alight on him in the crowd, or if the centurion's fancy had picked out somebody else to carry the Cross, then all his life would have been different. And so it is always. You go down one turning rather than another, and your whole career is coloured thereby. You miss a train, and you escape death. Our lives are like the Cornish rocking stones, pivoted on little points. The most apparently insignificant things have a strange knack of suddenly developing unexpected consequences, and turning out to be, not small things at all, but great and decisive and fruitful.

Let us then look with ever fresh wonder on this marvellous contexture of human life, and on Him that moulds it all to His own perfect purposes. Let us bring the highest and largest principles to bear on the

smallest events and circumstances, for you can never tell which of these is going to turn out a revolutionary and formative influence in your life. And if the highest Christian principle is not brought to bear upon the trifles, depend upon it, it will never be brought to bear upon the mighty things. The most part of every life is made up of trifles, and unless these are ruled by the highest motives, life, which is divided into grains like the sand, will have gone by, while we are waiting for the great events which we think worthy of being regulated by lofty principles. 'Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves.'

Look after the trifles, for the law of life is like that which is laid down by the Psalmist about the Kingdom of Jesus Christ: 'There shall be a handful of corn in the earth,' a little seed sown in an apparently ungenial place 'on the top of the mountains.' Ay! but this will come of it, 'The fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon,' and the great harvest of benediction or of curse, of joy or of sorrow, will come from the minute seeds that are sown in the great trifles of our daily life.

Let us learn the lesson, too, of quiet confidence in Him in whose hands the whole puzzling, overwhelming mystery lies. If a man once begins to think of how utterly incalculable the consequences of the smallest and most commonplace of his deeds may be, how they may run out into all eternity, and like divergent lines may enclose a space that becomes larger and wider the further they travel; if, I say, a man once begins to indulge in thoughts like these, it is difficult for him to keep himself calm and sane at all, unless he believes in the great loving Providence that lies above all, and shapes the vicissitude and mystery of life. We can leave all in His hands—and if we are wise we shall do



so—to whom *great* and *small* are terms that have no meaning; and who looks upon men's lives, not according to the apparent magnitude of the deeds with which they are filled, but simply according to the motive from which, and the purpose towards which, these deeds were done.

II. Then, still further, take this other lesson, which lies very plainly here—the blessedness and honour of helping Jesus Christ. If we turn to the story of the Crucifixion, in John's Gospel, we find that the narratives of the three other Gospels are, in some points, supplemented by it. In reference to our Lord's bearing of the Cross, we are informed by John that when He left the judgment hall He was carrying it Himself, as was the custom with criminals under the Roman law. The heavy cross was laid on the shoulder, at the intersection of its arms and stem, one of the arms hanging down in front of the bearer's body, and the long upright trailing behind.

Apparently our Lord's physical strength, sorely tried by a night of excitement and the hearings in the High priest's palace and before Pilate, as well as by the scourging, was unequal to the task of carrying, albeit for that short passage, the heavy weight. And there is a little hint of that sort in the context. In the verse before my text we read, 'They led Jesus out to crucify Him,' and in the verse after, 'they bring,' or *bear* 'Him to the place Golgotha,' as if, when the procession began, they led Him, and before it ended they had to carry Him, His weakness having become such that He Himself could not sustain the weight of His cross or of His own enfeebled limbs. So, with some touch of pity in their rude hearts, or more likely with professional impatience of delay, and eager to get their task

over, the soldiers lay hold of this stranger, press him into the service and make him carry the heavy upright, which trailed on the ground behind Jesus. And so they pass on to the place of execution.

Very reverently, and with few words, one would touch upon the physical weakness of the Master. Still, it does not do us any harm to try to realise how very marked was the collapse of His physical nature, and to remember that that collapse was not entirely owing to the pressure upon Him of the mere fact of physical death; and that it was still less a failure of His will, or like the abject cowardice of some criminals who have had to be dragged to the scaffold, and helped up its steps; but that the reason why His flesh failed was very largely because there was laid upon Him the mysterious burden of the world's sin. Christ's demeanour in the act of death, in such singular contrast to the calm heroism and strength of hundreds who have drawn all their heroism and strength from Him, suggests to us that, looking upon His sufferings, we look upon something the significance of which does not lie on the surface; and the extreme pressure of which is to be accounted for by that blessed and yet solemn truth of prophecy and Gospel alike—'The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.'

But, apart from that, which does not enter properly into my present contemplations, let us remember that though changed in form, very truly and really in substance, this blessedness and honour of helping Jesus Christ is given to us; and is demanded from us, too, if we are His disciples. He is despised and set at nought still. He is crucified afresh still. There are many men in this day who scoff at Him, mock Him, deny His claims, seek to cast Him down from His

throne, rebel against His dominion. It is an easy thing to be a disciple, when all the crowd is crying 'Hosanna!' It is a much harder thing to be a disciple when the crowd, or even when the influential cultivated opinion of a generation, is crying 'Crucify Him! crucify Him!' And some of you Christian men and women have to learn the lesson that if you are to be Christians you must be Christ's companions when His back is at the wall as well as when men are exalting and honouring Him, that it is your business to confess Him when men deny Him, to stand by Him when men forsake Him, to avow Him when the avowal is likely to bring contempt upon you from some people, and thus, in a very real sense, to bear His Cross after Him. 'Let us go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach';—the tail end of His Cross, which is the lightest! He has borne the heaviest end on His own shoulders; but we have to ally ourselves with that suffering and despised Christ if we are to be His disciples.

I do not dwell upon the lesson often drawn from this story, as if it taught us to 'take up *our* cross daily and follow Him.' That is another matter, and yet is closely connected with that about which I speak; but what I say is, Christ's Cross has to be carried to-day; and if we have not found out that it has, let us ask ourselves if we are Christians at all. There will be hostility, alienation, a comparative coolness, and absence of a full sense of sympathy with you, in many people, if you are a true Christian. You will come in for a share of contempt from the wise and the cultivated of this generation, as in all generations. The mud that is thrown after the Master will spatter your faces too, to some extent; and if you are walking with

Him you will be, to the extent of your communion with Him, objects of the aversion with which many men regard Him. Stand to your colours. Do not be ashamed of Him in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

And there is yet another way in which this honour of helping the Lord is given to us. As in His weakness He needed some one to aid Him to bear His Cross, so in His glory He needs our help to carry out the purposes for which the Cross was borne. The paradox of a man's carrying the Cross of Him who carried the world's burden is repeated in another form. He needs nothing, and yet He needs us. He needs nothing, and yet He needed that ass which was tethered at 'the place where two ways met,' in order to ride into Jerusalem upon it. He does not need man's help, and yet He does need it, and He asks for it. And though He bore Simon the Cyrenian's sins 'in His own body on the tree,' He needed Simon the Cyrenian to help Him to bear the tree, and He needs us to help Him to spread throughout the world the blessed consequences of that Cross and bitter Passion. So to us all is granted the honour, and from us all are required the sacrifice and the service, of helping the suffering Saviour.

III. Another of the lessons which may very briefly be drawn from this story is that of the perpetual recompense and record of the humblest Christian work. There were different degrees of criminality, and different degrees of sympathy with Him, if I may use the word, in that crowd that stood round the Master. The criminality varied from the highest degree of violent malignity in the Scribes and Pharisees, down to the lowest point of ignorance, and therefore all but entire innocence, on the part of the Roman

legionaries, who were merely the mechanical instruments of the order given, and stolidly 'watched Him there,' with eyes which saw nothing.

On the other hand, there were all grades of service, and help and sympathy, from the vague emotions of the crowd who beat their breasts, and the pity of the daughters of Jerusalem, or the kindly-meant help of the soldiers, who would have moistened the parched lips, to the heroic love of the women at the Cross, whose ministry was not ended even with His life. But surely the most blessed share in that day's tragedy was reserved for Simon, whose bearing of the Cross may have been compulsory at first, but became, ere it was ended, willing service. But whatever were the degrees of recognition of Christ's character, and of sympathy with the meaning of His sufferings, yet the smallest and most transient impulse of loving gratitude that went out towards Him was rewarded then, and is rewarded for ever, by blessed results in the heart that feels it.

Besides these results, service for Christ is recompensed, as in the instance before us, by a perpetual memorial. How little Simon knew that 'wherever in the whole world this gospel was preached, there also, this that *he* had done should be told for a memorial of *him*!' How little he understood when he went back to his rural lodging that night, that he had written his name high up on the tablet of the world's memory, to be legible for ever. Why, men have fretted their whole lives away to win what this man won, and knew nothing of—one line in the chronicle of fame.

So we may say, it shall be always, 'I will never forget any of their works.' We may not leave our deeds inscribed in any records that men can read. What

of that, if they are written in letters of light in the 'Lamb's Book of Life,' to be read out by Him before His Father and the holy angels, in that last great day? We may not leave any separable traces of our services, any more than the little brook that comes down some gully on the hillside flows separate from its sisters, with whom it has coalesced, in the bed of the great river, or in the rolling, boundless ocean. What of that so long as the work, in its consequences, shall last? Men that sow some great prairie broadcast cannot go into the harvest-field and say, 'I sowed the seed from which that ear came, and you the seed from which this one sprang.' But the waving abundance belongs to them all, and each may be sure that his work survives and is glorified there,—'that he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.' So a perpetual remembrance is sure for the smallest Christian service.

IV. The last lesson that I would draw is, let us learn from this incident the blessed results of contact with the suffering Christ. Simon the Cyrenian apparently knew nothing about Jesus Christ when the Cross was laid on his shoulders. He would be reluctant to undertake the humiliating task, and would plod along behind Him for a while, sullen and discontented, but by degrees be touched by more of sympathy, and get closer and closer to the Sufferer. And if he stood by the Cross when it was fixed, and saw all that transpired there, no wonder if, at last, after more or less protracted thought and search, he came to understand who He was that he had helped, and to yield himself to Him wholly.

Yes! dear brethren, Christ's great saying, 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me,' began to be fulfilled when He began to be lifted up. The centurion,

the thief, this man Simon, by looking on the Cross, learned the Crucified.

And it is the only way by which any of us will ever learn the true mystery and miracle of Christ's great and loving Being and work. I beseech you, take your places there behind Him, near His Cross; gazing upon Him till your hearts melt, and you, too, learn that He is your Lord, and your Saviour, and your God. The Cross of Jesus Christ divides men into classes as the Last Day will. It, too, parts men—'sheep' to the right hand, 'goats' to the left. If there was a penitent, there was an impenitent thief; if there was a convinced centurion, there were gambling soldiers; if there were hearts touched with compassion, there were mockers who took His very agonies and flung them in His face as a refutation of His claims. On the day when that Cross was reared on Calvary it began to be what it has been ever since, and is at this moment to every soul who hears the Gospel, 'a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death.' Contact with the suffering Christ will either bind you to His service, and fill you with His Spirit, or it will harden your hearts, and make you tenfold more selfish—that is to say, 'tenfold more a child of hell'—than you were before you saw and heard of that divine meekness of the suffering Christ. Look to Him, I beseech you, who bears what none can help Him to carry, the burden of the world's sin. Let Him bear yours, and yield to Him your grateful obedience, and then take up your cross daily, and bear the light burden of self-denying service to Him who has borne the heavy load of sin for you and all mankind.

## THE INCREDULOUS DISCIPLES

‘And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint Him. 2. And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. 3. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? 4. And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. 5. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. 6. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: He is risen; He is not here: behold the place where they laid Him. 7. But go your way, tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you. 8. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they anything to any man; for they were afraid. 9. Now, when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven devils. 10. And she went and told them that had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. 11. And they, when they had heard that He was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not. 12. After that He appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. 13. And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them.’—MARK XVI. 1-13.

It is not my business here to discuss questions of harmonising or of criticism. I have only to deal with the narrative as it stands. Its peculiar character is very plain. The manner in which the first disciples learned the fact of the Resurrection, and the disbelief with which they received it, much rather than the Resurrection itself, come into view in this section. The disciples, and not the risen Lord, are shown us. There is nothing here of the earthquake, or of the descending angel, or of the terrified guard, or of our Lord's appearance to the women. The two appearances to Mary Magdalene and to the travellers to Emmaus, which, in the hands of John and Luke, are so pathetic and rich, are here mentioned with the utmost brevity, for the sake chiefly of insisting on the disbelief of the disciples



who heard of them. Mark's theme is mainly what they thought of the testimony to the Resurrection.

I. He shows us, first, bewildered love and sorrow. We leave the question whether this group of women is the same as that of which Luke records that Joanna was one, as well as the other puzzle as to harmonising the notes of time in the Evangelists. May not the difference between the time of starting and that of arrival solve some of the difficulty? When all the notes are more or less vague, and refer to the time of transition from dark to day, when every moment partakes of both and may be differently described as belonging to either, is precision to be expected? In the whirl of agitation of that morning, would any one be at leisure to take much note of the exact minute? Are not these 'discrepancies' much more valuable as confirmation of the story than precise accord would have been? It is better to try to understand the feelings of that little band than to carp at such trifles.

Sorrow wakes early, and love is impatient to bring its tribute. So we can see these three women, leaving their abode as soon as the doleful grey of morning permitted, stealing through the silent streets, and reaching the rock-cut tomb while the sun was rising over Olivet. Where were Salome's ambitious hopes for her two sons now? Dead, and buried in the Master's grave. The completeness of the women's despair, as well as the faithfulness of their love, is witnessed by their purpose. They had come to anoint the body of Him to whom in life they had ministered. They had no thought of a resurrection, plainly as they had been told of it. The waves of sorrow had washed the remembrance of His assurances on that subject clean out of their minds.

Truth that is only half understood, however plainly spoken, is always forgotten when the time to apply it comes. We are told that the disbelief of the disciples in the Resurrection, after Christ's plain predictions of it, is 'psychologically impossible.' Such big words are imposing, but the objection is shallow. These disciples are not the only people who forgot in the hour of need the thing which it most concerned them to remember, and let the clouds of sorrow hide starry promises which would have turned mourning into dancing, and night into day. Christ's sayings about His resurrection were not understood in their, as it appears to us, obvious meaning when spoken. No wonder, then, that they were not expected to be fulfilled in their obvious meaning when He was dead. We shall have a word to say presently about the value of the fact that there was no anticipation of resurrection on the part of the disciples. For the present it is enough to note how these three loving souls confess their hopelessness by their errand. Did they not know, too, that Joseph and Nicodemus had been beforehand with them in their labour of love? Apparently not. It might easily happen, in the confusion and dispersion, that no knowledge of this had reached them; or perhaps sorrow and agitation had driven it out of their memories; or perhaps they felt that, whether others had done the same before or no, they must do it too, not because the loved form needed it, but because their hearts needed to do it. It was the love which must serve, not calculation of necessity, which loaded their hands with costly spices. The living Christ was pleased with the 'odour of a sweet smell,' from the needless spices, meant to re-anoint the dead Christ, and accepted the purpose, though it came from ignorance and was

never carried out, since its deepest root was love, genuine, though bewildered.

The same absence of 'calm practical common sense' is seen in the too late consideration, which never occurred to the three women till they were getting near the tomb, as to how to get into it. They do not seem to have heard of the guard; but they know that the stone is too heavy for them to move, and none of the men among the disciples had been taken into their confidence. 'Why did they not think of that before? what a want of foresight!' says the cool observer. 'How beautifully true to nature!' says a wiser judgment. To obey the impulse of love and sorrow without thinking, and then to be arrested on their road by a difficulty, which they might have thought of at first, but did not till they were close to it, is surely just what might have been expected of such mourners. Mark gives a graphic picture in that one word 'looking up,' and follows it with picturesque present tenses. They had been looking down or at each other in perplexity, when they lifted their eyes to the tomb, which was possibly on an eminence. What a flash of wonder would pass through their minds when they saw it open! What that might signify they would be eager to hurry to find out; but, at all events, their difficulty was at an end. When love to Christ is brought to a stand in its venturous enterprises by difficulties occurring for the first time to the mind, it is well to go close up to them; and it often happens that when we do, and look steadily at them, we see that they are rolled away, and the passage cleared which we feared was hopelessly barred.

II. The calm herald of the Resurrection and the amazed hearers. Apparently Mary Magdalene had turned back as soon as she saw the opened tomb, and

hurried to tell that the body had been carried off, as she supposed. The guard had also probably fled before this; and so the other two women enter the vestibule, and there find the angel. Sometimes one angel, sometimes two, sometimes none, were visible there. The variation in their numbers in the various narratives is not to be regarded as an instance of 'discrepancy.' Many angels hovered round the spot where the greatest wonder of the universe was to be seen, 'eagerly desiring to look into' that grave. The beholder's eye may have determined their visibility. Their number may have fluctuated. Mark does not use the word 'angel' at all, but leaves us to infer what manner of being he was who first proclaimed the Resurrection.

He tells of his youth, his attitude, and his attire. The angelic life is vigorous, progressive, buoyant, and alien from decay. Immortal youth belongs to them who 'excel in strength,' because they 'do his commandments.' That waiting minister shows us what the children of the Resurrection shall be, and so his presence as well as his speech expounds the blessed mystery of our life in the risen Lord. His serene attitude of sitting 'on the right side' is not only a vivid touch of description, but is significant of restfulness and fixed contemplation, as well as of the calmness of a higher life. That still watcher knows too much to be agitated; but the less he is moved, the more he adores. His quiet contrasts with and heightens the impression of the storm of conflicting feelings in the women's tremulous natures. His garments symbolise purity and repose. How sharply the difference between heaven and earth is given in the last words of verse 5! They were 'amazed,' swept out of themselves in an ecstasy of bewilderment in which hope had no place. Terror,

surprise, curiosity, wonder, blank incapacity to know what all this meant, made chaos in them.

The angel's words are a succession of short sentences, which have a certain dignity, and break up the astounding revelation he has to make into small pieces, which the women's bewildered minds can grasp. He calms their tumult of spirit. He shows them that he knows their errand. He adoringly names his Lord and theirs by the names recalling His manhood, His lowly home, and His ignominious death. He lingers on the thought, to him covering so profound a mystery of divine love, that his Lord had been born, had lived in the obscure village, and died on the Cross. Then, in one word, he proclaims the stupendous fact of His resurrection as His own act—'He is risen.' This crown of all miracles, which brings life and immortality to light, and changes the whole outlook of humanity, which changes the Cross into victory, and without which Christianity is a dream and a ruin, is announced in a single word—the mightiest ever spoken save by Christ's own lips. It was fitting that angel lips should proclaim the Resurrection, as they did the Nativity, though in either 'He taketh not hold of angels,' and they had but a secondary share in the blessings. Yet that empty grave opened to 'principalities and powers in heavenly places' a new unfolding of the manifold wisdom and love of God.

The angel—a true evangelist—does not linger on the wondrous intimation, but points to the vacant place, which would have been so drear but for his previous words, and bids them approach to verify his assurance, and with reverent wonder to gaze on the hallowed and now happy spot. A moment is granted for feeling to overflow, and certainty to be attained, and then the women are sent on their errand. Even the joy of that

gaze is not to be selfishly prolonged, while others are sitting in sorrow for want of what they know. That is the law for all the Christian life. First make sure work of one's own possession of the truth, and then hasten to tell it to those who need it.

'And Peter'—Mark alone gives us this. The other Evangelists might pass it by; but how could Peter ever forget the balm which that message of pardon and restoration brought to him, and how could Peter's mouthpiece leave it out? Is there anything in the Gospels more beautiful, or fuller of long-suffering and thoughtful love, than that message from the risen Saviour to the denier? And how delicate the love which, by calling him Peter, not Simon, reinstates him in his official position by anticipation, even though in the subsequent full restoration scene by the lake he is thrice called Simon, before the complete effacement of the triple denial by the triple confession!

Galilee is named as the rendezvous, and the word employed, 'goeth before you,' is appropriate to the Shepherd in front of His flock. They had been 'scattered,' but are to be drawn together again. He is to 'precede' them there, thus lightly indicating the new form of their relations to Him, marked during the forty days by a distance which prepared for his final withdrawal. Galilee was the home of most of them, and had been the field of His most continuous labours. There would be many disciples there, who would gather to see their risen Lord ('five hundred at once'); and there, rather than in Jerusalem which had slain Him, was it fitting that He should show Himself to His friends. The appearances in Jerusalem were all within a week (if we except the Ascension), and the connection in which Mark introduces them (if verse 14 be his) seems

to treat them as forced on Christ by the disciples' unbelief, rather than as His original intention. It looks as if He meant to show Himself in the city only to one or two, such as Mary, Peter, and some others, but to reserve His more public appearance for Galilee.

How did the women receive the message? Mark represents them as trembling in body and in an ecstasy in mind, and as hurrying away silent with terror. Matthew says that they were full of 'fear and great joy,' and went in haste to tell the disciples. In the whirl of feeling, there were opposites blended or succeeding one another; and the one Evangelist lays hold of one set, and the other of the other. It is as impossible to catalogue the swift emotions of such a moment as to separate and tabulate the hues of sunrise. The silence which Mark tells of can only refer to their demeanour as they 'fled.' His object is to bring out the very imperfect credence which, at the best, was given to the testimony that Christ was risen, and to paint the tumult of feeling in the breasts of its first recipients. His picture is taken from a different angle from Matthew's; but Matthew's contains the same elements, for he speaks of 'fear,' though he completes it by 'joy.'

III. The incredulity of the disciples. The two appearances to Mary Magdalene and the travellers to Emmaus are introduced mainly to record the unbelief of the disciples. A strange choice that was, of the woman who had been rescued from so low a debasement, to be first to see Him! But her former degradation was the measure of her love. Longing eyes, that have been washed clean by many a tear of penitent gratitude, are purged to see Jesus; and a yearning heart ever brings Him near. The unbelief of the story

of the two from Emmaus seems to conflict with Luke's account, which tells that they were met by the news of Christ's appearance to Simon. But the two statements are not contradictory. If we remember the excitement and confusion of mind in which they were, we shall not wonder if belief and unbelief followed each other, like the flow and recoil of the waves. One moment they were on the crest of the billows, and saw land ahead; the next they were down in the trough, and saw only the melancholy surge. The very fact that Peter was believed, might make them disbelieve the travellers; for how could Jesus have been in Jerusalem and Emmaus at so nearly the same time?

However the two narratives be reconciled, it remains obvious that the first disciples did not believe the first witnesses of the Resurrection, and that their unbelief is an important fact. It bears very distinctly on the worth of their subsequent conviction. It has special bearing on the most modern form of disbelief in the Resurrection, which accounts for the belief of the first disciples on the ground that they expected Christ to rise, and that they then persuaded themselves, in all good faith, that He had risen. That monstrous theory is vulnerable at all points, but one sufficient answer is—the disciples did not expect Christ to rise again, and were so far from it that they did not believe that He had risen when they were told it. Their original unbelief is a strong argument for the reliableness of their final faith. What raised them from the stupor of despair and incredulity? Only one answer is 'psychologically' reasonable: they at last believed because they saw. It is incredible that they were conscious deceivers; for such lives as they lived, and such a gospel as they preached, never came from liars. It is as in-



credible that they were unconsciously mistaken; for they were wholly unprepared for the Resurrection, and sturdily disbelieved all witnesses for it, till they saw with their own eyes, and had 'many infallible proofs.' Let us be thankful for their unbelief and its record, and let us seek to possess the blessing of those 'that have not seen, and yet have believed!'

## PERPETUAL YOUTH

‘And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment.’—MARK xvi. 5.

MANY great truths concerning Christ's death, and its worth to higher orders of being, are taught by the presence of that angel form, clad in the whiteness of his own God-given purity, sitting in restful contemplation in the dark house where the body of Jesus had lain. ‘Which things the angels desire to look into.’ Many precious lessons of consolation and hope, too, lie in the wonderful words which he spake from his Lord and theirs to the weeping waiting women. But to touch upon these ever so slightly would lead us too far from our more immediate purpose.

It strikes one as very remarkable that this super-human being should be described as a ‘*young man*.’ Immortal youth, with all of buoyant energy and fresh power which that attribute suggests, belongs to those beings whom Scripture faintly shows as our elder brethren. No waste decays their strength, no change robs them of forces which have ceased to increase. For them there never comes a period when memory is more than hope. Age cannot wither them. As one of our modern mystics has said, hiding imaginative spiritualism under a crust of hard, dry matter-of-fact, ‘In heaven the oldest angels are the youngest.’

What is true of them is true of God's children, who are ‘accounted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead,’ for ‘they are equal unto the angels.’ For believing and loving souls, death too is

a birth. All who pass through it to God, shall, in deeper meaning than lay in the words at first, 'return unto the days of their youth'; and when the end comes, and they are 'clothed with their house from heaven,' they shall stand by the throne, like him who sat in the sepulchre, clothed with lustrous light and radiant with unchanging youth.

Such a conception of the condition of the dead in Christ may be followed out in detail into many very elevating and strengthening thoughts. Let me attempt to set forth some of these now.

I. The life of the faithful dead is eternal progress towards infinite perfection.

For body and for spirit the life of earth is a definite whole, with distinct stages, which succeed each other in a well-marked order. There are youth, and maturity, and decay—the slow climbing to the narrow summit, a brief moment there in the streaming sunshine, and then a sure and gradual descent into the shadows beneath. The same equable and constant motion urges the orb of our lives from morning to noon, and from noon to evening. The glory of the dawning day, with its golden clouds and its dewy freshness, its new awakened hopes and its unworn vigour, climbs by silent, inevitable stages to the hot noon. But its ardours flame but for a moment; but for a moment does the sun poise itself on the meridian line, and the short shadow point to the pole. The inexorable revolution goes on, and in due time come the mists and dying purples of evening and the blackness of night. The same progress which brings April's perfumes burns them in the censer of the hot summer, and buries summer beneath the falling leaves, and covers its grave with winter's snow.

‘Everything that grows  
Holds in perfection but a little moment.’

So the life of man, being under the law of growth, is, in all its parts, subject to the consequent necessity of decline. And very swiftly does the direction change from ascending to descending. At first, and for a little while, the motion of the dancing stream, which broadens as it runs, and bears us past fields each brighter and more enamelled with flowers than the one before it, is joyous; but the slow current becomes awful as we are swept along when we would fain moor and land—and to some of us it comes to be tragic and dreadful at last, as we sit helpless, and see the shore rush past and hear the roar of the falls in our ears, like some poor wretch caught in the glassy smoothness above Niagara, who has flung down the oars, and, clutching the gunwale with idle hands, sits effortless and breathless till the plunge comes. Many a despairing voice has prayed as the sands ran out, and joys fled, ‘Sun, stand thou still on Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon,’ but in vain. Once the wish was answered; but, for all other fighters, the twelve hours of the day must suffice for victory and for joy. Time devours his own children. The morning hours come to us with full hands and give, the evening hours come with empty hands and take; so that at the last ‘naked shall he return to go as he came.’ Our earthly life runs through its successive stages, and for it, in body and mind, old age is the child of youth.

But the perfect life of the dead in Christ has but one phase, youth. It is growth without a limit and without decline. To say that they are ever young is the same thing as to say that their being never reaches its climax, that it is ever but entering on its glory;

that is, as we have said, that the true conception of their life is that of eternal progress towards infinite perfection.

For what is the goal to which they tend? The likeness of God in Christ—all His wisdom, His love, His holiness. He is all theirs, and His whole perfection is to be transfused into their growing greatness. 'He is made unto them of God, wisdom, and righteousness, and salvation and redemption,' nor can they cease to grow till they have outgrown Jesus and exhausted God. On the one hand is infinite perfection, destined to be imparted to the redeemed spirit. On the other hand is a capability of indefinite assimilation to, by reception of, that infinite perfection. We have no reason to set bounds to the possible expansion of the human spirit. If only there be fitting circumstances and an adequate impulse, it may have an endless growth. Such circumstances and such impulse are given in the loving presence of Christ in glory. Therefore we look for an eternal life which shall never reach a point beyond which no advance is possible. 'The path of the just' in that higher state 'shineth more and more,' and never touches the zenith. Here we float upon a landlocked lake, and on every side soon reach the bounding land; but there we are on a shoreless ocean, and never hear any voice that says, 'Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther.' Christ will be ever before us, the yet unattained end of our desires; Christ will be ever above us, fairer, wiser, holier, than we; after unsummed eternities of advance there will yet stretch before us a shining way that leads to Him. The language, which was often breathed by us on earth in tones of plaintive confession, will be spoken in heaven in gladness, 'Not as though I had attained, either were perfect, but I

follow after.' The promise that was spoken by Him in regard to our mortality will be repeated by Him in respect to our celestial being, 'I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it *more abundantly*.' And as this advance has no natural limit, either in regard to our Pattern or to ourselves, there will be no reverse direction to ensue. Here the one process has its two opposite parts; the same impulse carries up to the summit and forces down from it. But it is not so then. There growth will never merge into decay, nor exacting hours come to recall the gifts, which their free-handed sisters gave.

They who live in Christ, beyond the grave, begin with a relative perfection. They are thereby rendered capable of more complete Christ-likeness. The eye, by gazing into the day, becomes more recipient of more light; the spirit cleaves closer to a Christ more fully apprehended and more deeply loved; the whole being, like a plant reaching up to the sunlight, grows by its yearning towards the light, and by the light towards which it yearns—lifts a stronger stem and spreads a broader leaf, and opens into immortal flowers tinted by the sunlight with its own colours. This blessed and eternal growth towards Him whom we possess, to begin with, and never can exhaust, is the perpetual youth of God's redeemed.

We ought not to think of those whom we have loved and lost as if they had gone, carrying with them declining powers, and still bearing the marks of this inevitable law of stagnation, and then of decay, under which they groaned here. Think of them rather as having, if they sleep in Jesus, reversed all this, as having carried with them, indeed, all the gifts of matured experience and ripened wisdom which the

slow years bring, but likewise as having left behind all the weariness of accomplished aims, the monotony of a formed character, the rigidity of limbs that have ceased to grow. Think of them as receiving again from the hands of Christ much of which they were robbed by the lapse of years. Think of them as then crowned with loving-kindness and satisfied with good, so that 'their youth is renewed like the eagle's.' Think of them as again joyous, with the joy of beginning a career, which has no term but the sum of all perfection in the likeness of the infinite God. They rise like the song-bird, aspiring to the heavens, circling round, and ever higher, which 'singing still doth soar, and soaring ever singeth'—up and up through the steadfast blue to the sun! 'Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.' They shall lose the marks of age as they grow in eternity, and they who have stood before the throne the longest shall be likest him who sat in the sepulchre young with immortal strength, radiant with unwithering beauty.

II. The life of the faithful dead recovers and retains the best characteristics of youth.

Each stage of our earthly course has its own peculiar characteristics, as each zone of the world has its own vegetation and animal life. And, for the most part, these characteristics cannot be anticipated in the preceding stage, nor prolonged into the succeeding. To some small extent they will bear transplanting, and he is nearest a perfect man who carries into each period of his life some trace of the special beauty of that which went before, making 'the child the father of the man,' and carrying deep into old age the simple

self-forgetfulness of the child and the energy of the youth. But this can only be partially done by any effort; and even those whose happily constituted temperaments make it comparatively easy for them, do often carry the weakness rather than the strength of the earlier into the later epochs. It is easier to be always childish than to be always childlike. The immaturity and heedlessness of youth bear carriage better than the more precious vintages of that sunny land—its freshness of eye and heart, its openness of mind, its energy of hand. Even when these are in any measure retained—beautiful as they are in old age—they are but too apt to be associated with an absence of the excellences more proper to the later stages of life, and to involve a want of patient judgment, of sagacious discrimination, of rooted affections, of prudent, persistent action. Beautiful indeed it is when the grace of the child and the strength of the young man live on in the fathers, and when the last of life encloses all that was good in all that went before. But miserable it is, and quite as frequent a case, when grey hairs cover a childish brain, and an aged heart throbs with the feverish passion of youthful blood. So for this life it is difficult, and often not well, that youth should be prolonged into manhood and old age.

But the thought is none the less true, that the perfection of our being requires the reappearance and the continuance of all that was good in each successive stage of it in the past. The brightest aspects of youth will return to all who live in Jesus, beyond the grave, and will be theirs for ever. Such a consideration branches out into many happy anticipations, which we can but very cursorily touch on here.

For instance—Youth is the time for hope. The world



then lies all before us, fair and untried. We have not learnt our own weakness by many failures, nor the dread possibilities that lie in every future. The past is too brief to occupy us long, and its furthest point too near to be clothed in the airy purple, which draws the eye and stirs the heart. We are conscious of increasing powers which crave for occupation. It seems impossible but that success and joy shall be ours. So we live for a little while in a golden haze; we look down from our peak upon the virgin forests of a new world, that roll away to the shining waters in the west, and then we plunge into their mazes to hew out a path for ourselves, to slay the wild beasts, and to find and conquer rich lands. But soon we discover what hard work the march is, and what monsters lurk in the leafy coverts, and what diseases hover among the marshes, and how short a distance ahead we can see, and how far off it is to the treasure-cities that we dreamed of; and if at last we gain some cleared spot whence we can look forward, our weary eyes are searching at most for a place to rest, and all our hopes have dwindled to hopes of safety and repose. The day brings too much toil to leave us leisure for much anticipation. The journey has had too many failures, too many wounds, too many of our comrades left to die in the forest glades, to allow of our expecting much. We plod on, sometimes ready to faint, sometimes with lighter hearts, but not any more winged by hope as in the golden prime,—unless indeed for those of us who have fixed our hopes on God, and so get through the march better, because, be it rough or smooth, long or short, He moves before us to guide, and all our ways lead to Him. But even for these there comes, before very long, a time when they are weary of hoping for much

more here, and when the light of youth fades into common day. Be it so! They will get the faculty and the use of it back again in far nobler fashion, when death has taken them away from all that is transient, and faith has through death given for their possession and their expectation, the certitudes of eternity. It will be worth while to look forward again, when we are again standing at the beginning of a life. It will be possible once more to hope, when disappointments are all past. A boundless future stretching before us, of which we know that it is all blessed, and that we shall reach all its blessedness, will give back to hearts that have long ceased to drink of the delusive cup which earthly hope offered to their lips, the joy of living in a present, made bright by the certain anticipation of a yet brighter future. Losing nothing by our constant progress, and certain to gain all which we foresee, we shall remember and be glad, we shall hope and be confident. With 'the past unsighed for, and the future sure,' we shall have that magic gift, which earth's disappointments dulled, quickened by the sure mercies of the heavens.

Again, youth has mostly a certain keenness of relish for life which vanishes only too soon. There are plenty of our young men and women too, of this day, no doubt, who are as *blasé* and wearied before they are out of their 'teens as if they were fifty. So much the sadder for them, so much the worse for the social state which breeds such monsters. For monsters they are: there ought to be in youth a sense of fresh wonder undimmed by familiarity, the absence of satiety, a joy in joyful things because they are new as well as gladsome. The poignancy of these early delights cannot long survive. Custom stales them all,

and wraps everything in its robe of ashen grey. We get used to what was once so fresh and wonderful, and do not care very much about anything any more. We smile pitying smiles—sadder than any tears—at ‘boyish enthusiasm,’ and sometimes plume ourselves on having come to ‘years which bring the philosophic mind’; and all the while we know that we have lost a great gift, which here can never come back any more.

But what if that eager freshness of delight may yet be ours once again? What if the eternal youth of the heavens means, amongst other things, that *there* are pleasures which always satisfy but never cloy? What if, in perpetual advance, we find and keep for ever that ever new gladness, which here we vainly seek in perpetual distraction? What if constant new influxes of divine blessedness, and constant new visions of God, keep in constant exercise that sense of wonder, which makes so great a part of the power of youth? What if, after all that we have learned and all that we have received, we still have to say, ‘It doth not yet appear what we shall be’? Then, I think, in very profound and blessed sense, heaven would be perpetual youth.

I need not pause to speak of other characteristics of that period of life—such as its enthusiasm, its life by impulse rather than by reason, its buoyant energy and delight in action. All these gifts, so little cared for when possessed, so often misused, so irrevocably gone with a few brief years, so bitterly bewailed, will surely be found again, where God keeps all the treasures that He gives and we let fall. For transient enthusiasm, heaven will give us back a fervour of love like that of the seraphs, that have burned before His throne unconsumed and undecaying for unknown ages. For a

life of instinctive impulse, we shall then receive a life in which impulse is ever parallel with the highest law, and, doing only what we would, we shall do only what we ought. For energy which wanes as the years wax, and delight in action which is soon worn down into mechanical routine of toil, there will be bestowed strength akin to His 'who fainteth not, neither is weary.' All of which maturity and old age robbed us is given back in nobler form. All the limitation and weakness which they brought, the coldness, the monotony, the torpor, the weariness, will drop away. But we shall keep all the precious things which they brought us. None of the calm wisdom, the ripened knowledge, the full-summed experience, the powers of service acquired in life's long apprenticeship, will be taken from us.

All will be changed indeed. All will be cleansed of the impurity which attaches to all. All will be accepted and crowned, not by reason of its goodness, but by reason of Christ's sacrifice, which is the channel of God's mercy. Though in themselves unworthy, and having nothing fit for the heavens, yet the souls that trust in Jesus, the Lord of Life, shall bear into their glory the characters which by His grace they wrought out here on earth, transfigured and perfected, but still the same. And to make up that full-summed completeness, will be given to them at once the perfection of all the various stages through which they passed on earth. The perfect man in the heavens will include the graces of childhood, the energies of youth, the steadfastness of manhood, the calmness of old age; as on some tropical trees, blooming in more fertile soil and quickened by a hotter sun than ours, you may see at once bud, blossom, and fruit—the expectancy of

spring, and the maturing promise of summer, and the fulfilled fruition of autumn—hanging together on the unexhausted bough.

III. The faithful dead shall live in a body that cannot grow old.

Scripture assures us, I believe, that the dead in Christ are now in full, conscious enjoyment of His presence, and of all the blessedness that to dwell in Christ can bring to a spirit. All, then, which we have been saying applies to the present condition of those who sleep in Jesus. As concerning toil and trouble they take rest in sleep, as concerning contact with an outer world they slumber untroubled by its noise; but as concerning their communion with their Lord they, like us, 'whether we wake or sleep, live together with Him.' But we know too, from Scripture, that the dead in Christ wait for the resurrection of the body, without which they cannot be perfected, nor restored to full activity of outward life in connection with an external creation.

The lesson which we venture to draw from this text enforces the familiar teaching of Scripture as to that body of glory—that it cannot decay, nor grow old. In this respect, too, eternal youth may be ours. Here we have a bodily organisation which, like all other living bodies, goes through its appointed series of changes, wastes in effort, and so needs reparation by food and rest, dies in growing, and finally waxes old and dissolves. In such a house, a man cannot be ever young. The dim eye and shaking hand, the wrinkled face and thin grey hairs cannot but **age** the spirit, since they weaken its instruments.

If the redeemed of the Lord are to be always young in spirit, they must have a body which knows no

weariness, which needs no repose, which has no necessity of dying impressed upon it. And such a body Scripture plainly tells us will belong to those who are Christ's, at His coming. Our present acquaintance with the conditions of life makes that great promise seem impossible to many learned men amongst us. And I know not that anything but acquaintance with the sure word of God and with a risen Lord will make that seeming impossibility again a great promise for us. If we believe it at all, I think we must believe it because the resurrection of Jesus Christ says so, and because the Scriptures put it into articulate words as the promise of His resurrection. 'Ye do err,' said Christ long ago, to those who denied a resurrection, 'not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.' Then knowledge of the Scriptures leads to belief in the resurrection of the dead, and the remembrance of our ignorance of the power of God disposes of all the doubts which are raised on the supposition that His present works are the pattern of His future ones, or the limits of His unexhausted energy.

We are content then to fall back on Scripture words, and to believe in the resurrection of the dead simply because it is, as we believe, told us from God.

For all who accept the message, this hope shines clear, of a *building* of God imperishable and solid, when contrasted with the *tent* in which we dwell here—of a body 'raised in incorruption,' 'clothed with immortality,' and so, as in many another phrase, declared to be exempt from decay, and therefore vigorous with unchanging youth. How that comes we cannot tell. Whether because that body of glory has no proclivity to mutation and decay, or whether the perpetual volition and power of God counteract such tendency

and give, as the Book of Revelation says, 'to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God'—matters not at all. The truth of the promise remains, though we have no means of knowing more than the fact, that we shall receive a body, fashioned like His who dieth no more. There shall be no weariness nor consequent need for repose—'they rest not day nor night.' There shall be no faintness nor consequent craving for sustenance—'they shall hunger no more neither thirst any more.' There shall be no disease—'the inhabitant thereof shall no more say, I am sick,' 'neither can they die any more, for they are equal unto the angels.'

And if all this is true, that glorious and undecaying body will then be the equal and fit instrument of the perfected spirit, not, as it is now, the adequate instrument only of the natural life. The deepest emotions then will be capable of expression, nor as now, like some rushing tide, choke the floodgates through whose narrow aperture they try to press, and be all tossed into foam in the attempt. We shall then seem what we are, as we shall also be what we ought. All outward things will then be fully and clearly communicated to the spirit, for that glorious body will be a perfect instrument of knowledge. All that we desire to do we shall then do, nor be longer tortured with tremulous hands which can never draw the perfect circle that we plan, and stammering lips that will not obey the heart, and throbbing brain that *will* ache when we would have it clear. The ever-young spirit will have for true yokefellow a body that cannot tire, nor grow old, nor die.

The aged saints of God shall rise then in youthful beauty. More than the long-vanished comeliness shall

on that day rest on faces that were here haggard with anxiety, and pinched with penury and years. There will be no more palsied hands, no more scattered grey hairs, no more dim and horny eyes, no more stiffened muscles and slow throbbing hearts. 'It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.' It is sown in decaying old age, it is raised in immortal youth. His servants shall stand in that day among 'the young-eyed cherubim,' and be like them for ever. So we may think of the dead in Christ.

But do not forget that Christian faith may largely do for us here what God's grace and power will do for us in heaven, and that even now we may possess much of this great gift of perpetual youth. If we live for Christ by faith in Him, then may we carry with us all our days the energy, the hope, the joy of the morning tide, and be children in evil while men in understanding. With unworn and fresh heart we may 'bring forth fruit in old age,' and have the crocus in the autumnal fields as well as in the spring-time of our lives. So blessed, we may pass to a peaceful end, because we hold His hand who makes the path smooth and the heart quiet. Trust yourselves, my brethren, to the immortal love and perfect work of the Divine Saviour, and by His dear might your days will advance by peaceful stages, whereof each gathers up and carries forward the blessings of all that went before, to a death which shall be a birth. Its chill waters will be as a fountain of youth from which you will rise, beautiful and strong, to begin an immortality of growing power. A Christian life on earth solves partly, a Christian life in heaven solves completely, the problem of perpetual youth. For those who die in His faith and fear, 'better is the end than the beginning,



and the day of one's death than the day of one's birth.' Christ keeps the good wine until the close of the feast.

'Such is Thy banquet, dearest Lord ;  
O give us grace, to cast  
Our lot with Thine, to trust Thy word,  
And keep our best till last.'

## THE ANGEL IN THE TOMB

'... They saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. 6. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted. Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: He is risen; He is not here: behold the place where they laid Him.'—MARK xvi. 5, 6.

EACH of the four Evangelists tells the story of the Resurrection from his own special point of view. None of them has any record of the actual fact, because no eye saw it. Before the earthquake and the angelic descent, before the stone was rolled away, while the guards perhaps slept, and before Love and Sorrow had awakened, Christ rose. And deep silence covers the event. But in treating of the subsequent portion of the narrative, each Evangelist stands at his own point of view. Mark has scarcely anything to say about our Lord's appearance after the Resurrection. His object seems mainly to be to describe rather the manner in which the report of the Resurrection affected the disciples, and so he makes prominent the bewildered astonishment of the women. If the latter part of this chapter be his, he passes by the appearance of our Lord to Mary Magdalene and to the two travellers to Emmaus with just a word for each—contrasting singularly with the lovely narrative of the former in John's Gospel and with the detailed account of the latter in Luke's. He emphasises the incredulity of the Twelve after receiving the reports, and in like manner he lays stress upon the unbelief and hardness of heart which the Lord rebuked.

So, then, this incident, the appearance of the angel, the portion of his message to the women which we

have read, and the way in which the first testimony to the Resurrection affected its hearers, may suggest to us some thoughts which, though subsidiary to the main teaching of the Resurrection, may yet be important in their place.

#### I. Note the first witness to the Resurrection.

There are singular diversities in the four Gospels in their accounts of the angelic appearances, the number, occupation, and attitude of these superhuman persons; and contradictions may be spun, if one is so disposed, out of these varieties. But it is wiser to take another view of them, and to see in the varying reports, sometimes of one angel, sometimes of two, sometimes of one sitting outside the sepulchre, sometimes one within, sometimes none, either different moments of time or differences produced by the different spiritual condition of the beholders. Who can count the glancing wings of the white-winged flock of sea-birds as they sail and turn in the sunshine? Who can count the numbers of these 'bright-harnessed angels,' sometimes more, sometimes less, flickering and fluttering into and out of sight, which shone upon the vision of the weeping onlookers? We know too little about the laws of angelic appearances; we know too little about the relation in that high region between the seeing eye and the objects beheld to venture to say that there is contradiction where the narratives present variety. Enough for us to draw the lessons that are suggested by that quiet figure sitting there in the inner vestibule of the grave, the stone rolled away and the work done, gazing on the tomb where the Lord of men and angels had lain.

He was a youth. 'The oldest angels are the youngest,' says a great mystic. The angels 'excel in strength'

because they 'delight to do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word.' The lapse of ages brings not age to them who 'wait on the Lord' in the higher ministries of heaven, and run unwearied, and walk unfainting, and when they are seen by men are radiant with immortal youth. He was 'clothed in a long white garment,' the sign at once of purity and of repose; and he was sitting in rapt contemplation and quiet adoration there, where the body of Jesus had lain.

But what had he to do with the joy of Resurrection? It delivered *him* from no fears, it brought to him no fresh assurance of a life which was always his. Wherefore was he there? Because that Cross strikes its power upwards as well as downwards; because He that had lain there is the Head of all creation, and the Lord of angels as well as of men; because that Resurrection following upon that Cross, 'unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places,' opened a new and wonderful door into the unsounded and unfathomed abyss of divine love; because into these things 'angels desire to look,' and, looking, are smitten with adoring wonder and flushed with the illumination of a new knowledge of what God is, and of what man is to God. The Resurrection of the Prince of Life was no mystery to the angel. To him the mystery was in His death. To us the death is not a mystery, but the Resurrection is. That gazing figure looks from the other side upon the grave which we contemplate from this side of the gulf of death; but the eyes of both orders of Being fix upon the same hallowed spot—they in adoring wonder that there a God should have lain; we in lowly thankfulness that thence a man should have risen.

Further, we see in that angel presence not only the indication that Christ is his King as well as ours, but also the mark of his and all his fellows' sympathetic participation in whatsoever is of so deep interest to humanity. There is a certain tone of friendship and oneness in his words. The trembling women were smitten into an ecstasy of bewildered fear (as one of the words, 'affrighted,' might more accurately be rendered), and his consolation to them, 'Be not affrighted, ye seek Jesus,' suggests that, in all the great sweep of the unseen universe, whatsoever beings may people that to us apparently waste and solitary space, howsoever many they may be, 'thick as the autumn leaves in Vallambrosa,' or as the motes that dance in the sunshine, they are all friends and allies and elder brethren of those who seek for Jesus with a loving heart. No creature that owns His sway can touch or injure or need terrify the soul that follows after Christ. 'All the servants of our King in heaven and earth are one,' and He sends forth His brightest and loftiest to be brethren and ministers to them who shall be 'heirs of salvation.' So we may pass through the darkest spaces of the universe and the loneliest valleys of the shadow of death, sure that whosoever may be there will be our friend if we are the friends of Christ.

II. So much, then, for the first point that I would suggest here. Note, secondly, the triumphant light cast upon the cradle and the Cross.

There is something very remarkable, because for purposes of identification plainly unnecessary, in the minute particularity of the designation which the angel lips give to Jesus Christ. 'Jesus, the Nazarene, who was crucified.' Do you not catch a tone of wonder and a tone of triumph in this threefold particularising

of the humanity, the lowly residence, and the ignominious death? All that lowliness, suffering, and shame are brought into comparison with the rising from the dead. That is to say, when we grasp the fact of a risen Christ, we look back upon all the story of His birth, His lowly life, His death of shame, and see a new meaning in it, and new reasons for triumph and for wonder. The cradle is illuminated by the grave, the Cross by the empty sepulchre. As at the beginning there is a supernatural entrance into life, so at the end there is a supernatural resumption of it. The birth corresponds with the resurrection, and both witness to the divinity. The lowly life culminates in the conquest over death; the Nazarene despised, rejected, dwelling in a place that was a byword, sharing all the modest lowliness and self-respecting poverty of the Galilean peasants, has conquered death. The Man that was crucified has conquered death. And the fact that He has risen explains and illuminates the fact that He died.

Brethren, let us lay this to heart, that unless we believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the saying 'He was crucified' is the saddest word that can be spoken about any of the great ones of the past. If Jesus Christ be lying in some nameless grave, then all the power of His death is gone, and He and it are nothing to me, or to you, or to any of our fellow-men, more than a thousand deaths of the mighty ones of old. But Easter day transfigures the gloom of the day of the Crucifixion, and the rising sun of its morning gilds and explains the Cross. Now it stands forth as the great redeeming power of the world, where my sins and yours and the whole world's have been expiated and done away. And now, instead of being ignominy, it is glory, and instead of being defeat it is victory, and

instead of looking upon that death as the lowest point of the Master's humiliation, we may look upon it as He Himself did, as the highest point of His glorifying. For the Cross then becomes His great means of winning men to Himself, and the very throne of His power. On the historical fact of a Resurrection depend all the worth and meaning of the death of Christ. 'If He be not risen our preaching is vain, and your faith is also vain.' 'If Christ be not risen, ye are yet in your sins.' But if what this day commemorates be true, then upon all His earthly life is thrown a new light; and we first understand the Cross when we look upon the empty grave.

III. Again, notice here the majestic announcement of the great fact, and its confirmation.

'He is risen; He is not here.' The first preacher of the Resurrection was an angel, a true *ev-angel-ist*. His message is conveyed in these brief sentences, unconnected with each other, in token, not of abruptness and haste, but of solemnity. 'He is risen' is one word in the original—a sentence of one word, which announces the mightiest miracle that ever was wrought upon earth, a miracle which opens the door wide enough for all supernatural events recorded of Jesus Christ to find an entrance to the understanding and the reason.

'He is risen.' The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is declared by angel lips to be His own act; not, indeed, as if He were acting separately from the Father, but still less as if in it He were merely passive. Think of that; a dead Christ raised Himself. That is the teaching of the Scripture. I do not dwell here, at this stage of my sermon, on the many issues that spring from such a conception, but this only I urge, Jesus Christ was the

Lord of life; held life and death, His own and others', at His beck and will. His death was voluntary; He was not passive in it, but He died because He chose. His resurrection was His act; He rose because He willed. 'I have power to lay it down, I have power to take it again.' No one said to Him, 'I say unto Thee, arise!' The divine power of the Father's will did not work upon Him as from without to raise Him from the dead; but He, the embodiment of divinity, raised Himself, even though it is also true that He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. These two statements are not contradictory, but the former of them can only be predicated of Him; and it sets Him on a pedestal immeasurably above, and infinitely apart from, all those to whom life is communicated by a divine act. He Himself is 'the Life,' and it was not possible that Life should be holden of Death; therefore He burst its bonds, and, like the ancient Jewish hero, though in far nobler fashion, our Samson enters into the city which is a prison, and on His strong shoulders bears away the gates, that none may ever there be prisoners without hope.

Now, then, note the confirmation of this stupendous fact. 'He is risen; He is not here.' The grave was empty, and the trembling women were called upon to look and see for themselves that the body was not there. One remark is all that I wish to make about this matter—viz. this, all theories, ancient or modern, which deny the Resurrection, are shattered by this one question, What became of Jesus Christ's body? We take it as a plain historical fact, which the extremest scepticism has never ventured to deny, that the grave of Christ was empty. The trumped-up story of the guards sufficiently shows that. When the belief of a



resurrection began to be spread abroad, what would have been easier for Pharisees and rulers than to have gone to the sepulchre and rolled back the stone, and said, 'Look there! there is your risen Man, lying mouldering, like all the rest of us.' They did not do it. Why? Because the grave was empty. Where was the body? They had it not, else they would have been glad to produce it. The disciples had it not, for if they had, you come back to the discredited and impossible theory that, having it, and knowing that they were telling lies, they got up the story of the Resurrection. Nobody believes that nowadays—nobody can believe it who looks at the results of the preaching of this, by hypothesis, falsehood. 'Men do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles.' And whether the disciples were right or wrong, there can be no question in the mind of anybody who is not prepared to swallow impossibilities compared to which miracles are easy, that the first disciples heartily believed that Jesus Christ was risen from the dead. As I say, one confirmation of the belief lies in the empty grave, and this question may be put to anybody that says 'I do not believe in your Resurrection':—'What became of the sacred body of Jesus Christ?'

Now, note the way in which the announcement of this tremendous fact was received. With blank bewilderment and terror on the part of these women, followed by incredulity on the part of the Apostles and of the other disciples. These things are on the surface of the narrative, and very important they are. They plainly tell us that the first hearers did not believe the testimony which they themselves call upon us to believe. And, that being the state of mind of the early disciples on the Resurrection day, what becomes of the modern

theory, which seeks to explain the fact of the early belief in the Resurrection by saying, 'Oh, they had worked themselves into such a fever of expectation that Jesus Christ would rise from the dead that the wish was father to the thought, and they said that He did because they expected that He would'? No! they did not expect that He would; it was the very last thing that they expected. They had not in their minds the soil out of which such imaginations would grow. They were perfectly unprepared to believe it, and, as a matter of fact, they did not believe until they had seen. So I think that that one fact disposes of a great deal of pestilent and shallow talk in these days that tries to deny the Resurrection and to save the character of the men that witnessed it.

IV. And now, lastly, note here the summons to grateful contemplation.

'Behold the place where they laid Him.' To these women the call was simply one to come and see what would confirm the witness. But we may, perhaps, permissibly turn it to a wider purpose, and say that it summons us all to thankful, lowly, believing, glad contemplation of that empty grave as the basis of all our hopes. Look upon it and upon the Resurrection which it confirms to us as an historical fact. It sets the seal of the divine approval on Christ's work, and declares the divinity of His person and the all-sufficiency of His mighty sacrifice. Therefore let us, laden with our sins and seeking for reconciliation with God, and knowing how impossible it is for us to bring an atonement or a ransom for ourselves, look upon that grave and learn that Christ has offered the sacrifice which God has accepted, and with which He is well pleased.

'Behold the place where they laid Him,' and, looking

upon it, let us think of that Resurrection as a prophecy, with a bearing upon us and upon all the dear ones that have trod the common road into the great darkness. Christ has died, therefore they live; Christ lives, therefore we shall never die. His grave was in a garden—a garden indeed. The yearly miracle of the returning ‘life re-orient out of dust,’ typifies the mightier miracle which He works for all that trust in Him, when out of death He leads them into life. The graveyard has become ‘God’s acre’; the garden in which the seed sown in weakness is to be raised in power, and sown corruptible is to be raised in incorruption.

‘Behold the place where they laid Him,’ and in the empty grave read the mystery of the Resurrection as the pattern and the symbol of our higher life; that, ‘like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.’ Oh to partake more and more of that power of His Resurrection!

In Christ’s empty grave is planted the true ‘tree of life, which is in the midst of the “true” Paradise of God.’ And we, if we truly trust and humbly love that Lord, shall partake of its fruits, and shall one day share the glories of His risen life in the heavens, even as we share the power of it here and now.

## LOVE'S TRIUMPH OVER SIN

'Tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee.

MARK XVI. 7.

THE prevailing tradition of Christian antiquity ascribes this Gospel to John Mark, sister's son to Barnabas, and affirms that in composing it he was in some sense the 'interpreter' of the Apostle Peter. Some confirmation of this alleged connection between the Evangelist and the Apostle may be gathered from the fact that the former is mentioned by the latter as with him when he wrote his First Epistle. And, in the Gospel itself, there are some little peculiarities which seem to look in the same direction. A certain speciality is traceable here and there, both in omissions of incidents in the Apostle's life recorded by some of the other Evangelists, and in the addition of slight facts concerning him unnoticed by them.

Chief among these is the place which his name holds in this very remarkable message, delivered by the angels to the women who came to Christ's tomb on the Resurrection morning. Matthew, who also reports the angels' words, has only 'tell His disciples.' Mark adds the words, which must have come like wine and oil to the bruised heart of the denier, 'tell His disciples *and Peter.*' To the others, it was of little importance that his name should have been named then; to him it was life from the dead, that he should have been singled out to receive a word of forgiveness and a summons to meet his Lord; as if He had said through His angel messengers—'I would see them all; but whoever may

stay behind, let not *him* be absent from our glad meeting again.'

We find, too, that the same individualising of the Apostle, which led to his being thus greeted in the first thoughts of his risen Lord, led also to an interview with Him on that same day, about which not a syllable of detail is found in any Gospel, though the fact was known to the whole body of the disciples. For when the two friends who had met Christ at Emmaus came back in the night with their strange tidings, their eagerness to tell their joyful news is anticipated by the eagerness of the brethren to tell *their* wonderful story: 'The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.' Paul, too, gives that meeting, when the Lord was alone with the penitent, the foremost place in his list of the evidences of Christ's resurrection, 'He was seen of Cephas.' What passed then is hidden from all eyes. The secrets of that hour of deep contrition and healing love Peter kept secretly curtained from sight, in the innermost chamber of his memory. But we may be sure that then forgiveness was sought and granted, and the bond that fastened him to his Lord was welded together again, where it had snapped, and was the stronger because it had been broken, and at the point of fracture

The man must be first re-united to his Saviour, before the Apostle can be reinstated in his functions. In secrecy, not beheld by any, is the personal act of restoration to love and friendship effected; and then in public, before his brethren, who were concerned in his official position, but not in his personal relation to his Lord, the reappointment of the pardoned disciple to his apostleship takes place. His sin had had a public aspect, and his threefold denial must, in so far

as it was an outward act, be effaced by his threefold confession. Then he becomes again 'Peter,'—not merely 'Simon Bar Jonas'; and, as the Book of the Acts shows, never ceases to hear the divine commissions, 'Feed My sheep,' 'Follow Me'; nor ever forgets the lessons he had learned in these bitter hours of self-loathing, and in the rapturous moments when again he saw his Lord.

Putting all these things together—this message from Christ, the interview which followed it, and the subsequent history of the Apostle—we have a connected series of facts which may illustrate for us, better than many dry words of mine could do, the triumph over sin of the forgiving love of Christ.

I. Notice, then, first, the loving message with which He beckons the wanderer back.

If we try to throw ourselves back into the Apostle's black thoughts during the interval between his denial and the Resurrection morning, we shall better feel what this love-token from the grave must have been to him. His natural character, as well as his real love for his Master, ensured that his lies could not long content him. They were uttered so vehemently because they were uttered in spite of inward resistance. Overpowered by fear, beaten down from all his vain-glorious self-confidence by a woman-servant's sharp tongue and mocking eye, he lied—and then came the rebound. The same impulsive vehemence which had hurried him into the fault, would swing him back again to quick penitence when the cock crew, and that Divine Face, turning slowly from before the judgment-seat with the sorrow of wounded love upon it, silently said, 'Remember.' We can fancy how that bitter weeping, which began so soon, grew more passionate and more bitter when the end came. We are singularly happy if we do not know

the pang of remembering some fault to the loved dead—some hasty word, some momentary petulance, some selfish disregard of their happiness, some sullen refusal of their tenderness. How the thought that it is all irrevocable now embitters the remorse! How passionately we long that we could have one of the moments again, which seemed so trivial while we possessed them, that we might confess and be forgiven, and atone! And this poor, warm-hearted, penitent denier had to think that his very last act to the Lord whom he loved so well had been such an act of cowardly shrinking from acknowledging Him; and that henceforward his memory of that dear face was to be for ever saddened by that last look! That they should have parted so! that that sad gaze was to be the last he should ever have, and that *it* was to haunt him for the rest of his life! We can understand how heavily the hours passed on that dreary Saturday. If, as seems probable, he was with John in his home, whither the latter had led the mother of our Lord, what a group were gathered there, each with a separate pang from the common sorrow!

Into this sorrow come the tidings that all was not over, that the irrevocable was not irrevocable, that perhaps new days of loyal love might still be granted, in which the doleful failure of the past might be forgotten; and then, whether before or after his hurried rush to the grave we need not here stay to inquire, follows the message of our text, a word of forgiveness and reconciliation, sent by the Lord as the herald and outrider of His own coming, to bring gladness and hope ere He Himself draws near.

Think of this message as a revelation of love that is stronger than death.

The news of Christ's resurrection must have struck awe, but not necessarily joy, into the disciples' hearts. The dearest ones suffer so solemn a change to our apprehensions when they pass into the grave, that to many a man it would be maddening terror to meet those whom he loved and still loves. So there must have been a spasm of fear even among Christ's friends when they heard of Him as risen again, and much confusing doubt as to what would be the amount of resemblance to His old self. They probably dreaded to find Him far removed from their familiar love, forgetful perhaps of much of the old life, with other thoughts than before, with the atmosphere of the other world round about Him, which glorified Him indeed, but separated Him too from those whose grosser lungs could live only in this thick air. These words of our text would go far to scatter all such fears. They link on the future to the past, as if His first thought when He rose had been to gather up again the dropped threads of their intercourse, and to carry on their ancient concord and companionship as though no break had been at all. For all the disciples, and especially for him who is especially named, they confirm the identity of Christ's whole dispositions towards them now, with those which He had before. Death has not changed Him at all. Much has been done since He left them; the world's history has been changed, but nothing which has happened has had any effect on the reality of His love, and on the inmost reality of their companionship. In these respects they are where they were, and even Calvary and the tomb are but as a parenthesis. The old bonds are all re-knit, and the junction is all but imperceptible.

This is how we have to think of our Lord now, in



His attitude towards us. We, too, may have our share in that message, which came like morning twilight before He shone upon the apostles' darkness. To them it proclaimed a love which was stronger than death. To us it may declare a love which is stronger than all change of circumstances. He is no more parted from us by the Throne than from them by the Cross. He descended into 'the lower parts of the earth,' and His love lived on, and so it does now, when He has 'ascended up far above all heavens.' Love knows no difference of place, conditions, or functions. From out of the blazing heart of the Glory the same tender face looks that bent over sick men's pallets, and that turned on Peter in the judgment-hall. The hand that holds the sceptre of the universe is the hand that was nailed to the Cross, and that was stretched out to that same Peter when he was ready to sink. The breast that is girt with the golden girdle of priestly sovereignty is the same tender home on which John's happy head rested in placid contentment. All the love that ever flowed from Christ flows from Him still. To Him, 'whose nature and whose name are Love,' it matters nothing whether He is in the house at Bethany, or in the upper room, or hanging on the Cross, or lying in the grave, or risen from the dead, or seated on the right hand of God. He is the same everywhere and always. 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love.'

Again, this message is the revelation of a love that is not turned away by our sinful changes.

Peter may have thought that he had, with his own words, broken the bond between him and his Lord. He had renounced his allegiance; was the renunciation to be accepted? He had said, 'I am not one of them'; did Christ answer, 'Be it so; one of them thou shalt no

more be'?' The message from the women's lips settled the question, and let him feel that, though his grasp of Christ had relaxed, Christ's grasp of him had not. He might change, he might cease for a time to prize his Lord's love, he might cease either to be conscious of it or to wish for it; but that love could not change. It was unaffected by his unfaithfulness, even as it had not been originated by his fidelity. Repelled, it still lingered beside him. Disowned, it still asserted its property in him. Being reviled, it blessed; being persecuted, it endured; being defamed, it entreated; and, patient through all wrongs and changes, it loved on till it had won back the erring heart, and could fill it with the old blessedness again.

And is not that same miracle of long-enduring love presented before every one of us, as in Christ's heart for us? True, our sin interferes with our sense of it, and modifies the form in which it must deal with us; but, however real and disastrous may be the power of our evil in troubling the communion of love between us and our Lord, and in compelling Him to smite before He binds up, never forget that our sin is utterly impotent to turn away the tide that sets to us from the heart of Christ. Earthborn vapours may hang about the low levels, and turn the gracious sun himself into a blood-red ball of lurid fire; but they reach only a little way up, and high above their region is the pure blue, and the blessed light pours down upon the upper surface of the white mist, and thins away its opaqueness, and dries up its clinging damp, and at last parts it into filmy fragments that float out of sight, and the dwellers on the green earth see the sun, which was always there even when they could not behold it, and which, by shining on, has conquered all the obstructions that veiled

its beams. Sin is mighty, but one thing sin cannot do, and that is to make Christ cease to love us. Sin is mighty, but one other thing sin cannot do, and that is to prevent Christ from manifesting His love to us sinners, that we may learn to love and so may cease to sin. Christ's love is not at the beck and call of our fluctuating affections. It has its source deeper than in the springs in our hearts, namely in the depths of His own nature. It is not the echo or the answer to ours, but ours is the echo to His; and that being so, our changes do not reach to it, any more than earth's seasons affect the sun. For ever and ever He loves. Whilst we forget Him, He remembers us. Whilst we repay Him with neglect or with hate, He still loves. If we believe not, He still abides faithful to His merciful purpose, and, in spite of all that we can do, will not deny Himself, by ceasing to be the incarnate Patience, the perfect Love. He is Himself the great ensample of that 'charity' which His Apostle painted; He is not easily provoked; He is not soon angry; He beareth all things; He hopeth all things. We cannot get away from the sweep of His love, wander we ever so far. The child may struggle in the mother's arms, and beat the breast that shelters it with its little hand; but it neither hurts nor angers that gentle bosom, nor loosens the firm but loving grasp that holds it fast. He carries, as a nurse does, His wayward children, and, blessed be His name! His arm is too strong for us to shake it off, His love too divine for us to dam it back.

And still further, here we see a love which sends a special message because of special sin.

If one was to be singled out from the little company to receive by name the summons of the Lord to meet Him in Galilee, we might have expected it to have

been that faithful friend who stood beneath the Cross, till his Lord's command sent him to his own home; or that weeping mother whom he then led away with him; or one of the two who had been turned from secret disciples into confessors by the might of their love, and had laid His body with reverent care in the grave in the garden. Strange reward for true love that they should be merged in the general message, and strange recompense for treason and cowardice that Peter's name should be thus distinguished! Is sin, then, a passport to His deeper love? Is the murmur true after all, 'Thou never gavest me a kid, but as soon as this thy son is come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf'? Yes, and no. No, inasmuch as the unbroken fellowship hath in it calm and deep joys which the returning prodigal does not know, and all sin lays waste and impoverishes the soul. Yes, inasmuch as He, who knows all our needs, knows that the denier needs a special treatment to bring him back to peace, and that the further a poor heart has strayed from Him, the mightier must be the forthputting of manifested love, if it is to be strong enough to travel across all the dreary wastes, and draw back again, to its orbit among its sister planets, the wandering star. The depth of our need determines the strength of the restorative power put forth. They who had not gone away would come at the call addressed to them all, but he who had sundered himself from them and from the Lord would remain in his sad isolation, unless some special means were used to bring him back. The more we have sinned, the less can we believe in Christ's love; and so the more we have sinned, the more marvellous and convincing does He make the testimony and

operations of His love to us. It is ever to the poor bewildered sheep, lying panting in the wilderness, that He comes. Among His creatures, the race which has sinned is that which receives the most stupendous proof of the seeking divine love. Among men, the publicans and the harlots, the denying Peters and the persecuting Pauls, are they to whom the most persuasive entreaties of His love are sent, and on whom the strongest powers of His grace are brought to bear. Our sin cannot check the flow of His love. More marvellous still, our sin occasions a mightier burst of the manifestation of His love, for eyes blinded by selfishness and carelessness, or by fear and despair, need to see a brightness beyond the noonday sun, ere they can behold the amazing truth of His love to them; and what they need, they get. 'Go, tell Peter.'

Here, too, is the revelation of a love which singles out a sinful man by name. ✓

Christ does not deal with us in the mass, but soul by soul. Our finite minds have to lose the individual in order to grasp the class. Our eyes see the wood far off on the mountain-side, but not the single trees, nor each fluttering leaf. We think of 'the race'—the twelve hundred millions that live to-day, and the uncounted crowds that have been, but the units in that inconceivable sum are not separate in our view. But He does not generalise so. He has a clear individualising knowledge of each; each separately has a place in His mind or heart. To each He says, 'I know thee by name.' He loves the world, because He loves every single soul with a distinct love. And His messages of blessing are as specific and individualising as the love from which they come. He speaks to each of us as truly as He singled out Peter here, as truly as when

His voice from heaven said, 'Saul, Saul.' English names are on His lips as really as Jewish ones. He calls to *thee* by *thy* name—thou hast a share in His love. To thee the call to trust Him is addressed, and to thee forgiveness, help, purity, life eternal are offered. Thou hast sinned; that only infuses deeper tenderness into His beseeching tones. Thou hast gone further from Him than some of thy fellows; that only makes His recovering energy greater. Thou hast denied His name; that only makes Him speak thine with more persuasive invitation.

Look, then, at this one instance of a love stronger than death, mightier than sin, sending its special greeting to the denier, and learn how deep the source, how powerful the flow, how universal the sweep, of that river of the love of God, which streams to us through the channel of Christ His Son.

II. Notice, secondly, the secret meeting between our Lord and the Apostle.

That is the second stage in the victorious conflict of divine love with man's sin. As I have said, that interview took place on the day of the Resurrection, apparently before our Lord joined the two sorrowful travellers to Emmaus, and certainly before He appeared to the company gathered by night in the closed chamber. The fact was well known, for it is referred to by Luke and by Paul, but nothing beyond the fact seems to have been known, or at all events is made public by them. All this is very significant and very beautiful.

What tender consideration there is in meeting Peter alone, before seeing him in the companionship of the others! How painful would have been the rush of the first emotions of shame awakened by Christ's presence, if their course had been checked by any eye but His

own beholding them! How impossible it would have then been to have poured out all the penitent confessions with which his heart must have been full, and how hard it would have been to have met for the first time, and not to have poured them out! With most loving insight, then, into the painful embarrassment, and dread of unsympathising standers-by, which must have troubled the contrite Apostle, the Lord is careful to give him the opportunity of weeping his fill on His own bosom, unrestrained by any thought of others, and will let him sob out his contrition to His own ear alone. Then the meeting in the upper chamber will be one of pure joy to Peter, as to all the rest. The emotions which he has in common with them find full play, in that hour when all are reunited to their Lord. The experience which belongs to himself alone has its solitary hour of unrecorded communion. The first to whom He, who is 'separate from sinners,' appeared was 'Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven devils.' The next were the women who bore this message of forgiveness; and probably the next was the one among all the company who had sinned most grievously. So wondrous is the order of His preferences, coming ever nearest to those who need Him most.

And may we not regard this secret interview as representing for us what is needed on our part to make Christ's forgiving love our own? There must be the personal contact of my soul with the loving heart of Christ, the individual act of my own coming to Him, and, as the old Puritans used to say, 'my transacting' with Him. Like the ocean of the atmosphere, His love encompasses me, and in it I 'live, and move, and have my being.' But I must let it flow into my spirit,

and stir the dormant music of my soul. I can shut it out, sealing my heart love-tight against it. I do shut it out, unless by my own conscious, personal act I yield myself to Him, unless by my own faith I come to Him, and meet Him, secretly and really as did the penitent Apostle, whom the message, that proclaimed the love of his Lord, emboldened to meet the Lord who loved, and by His own lips to be assured of forgiveness and friendship. It is possible to stumble at noontide, as in the dark. A man may starve, outside of barns filled with plenty, and his lips may be parched with thirst, though he is within sight of a broad river flowing in the sunshine. So a soul may stiffen into the death of self and sin, even though the voice that wakes the dead to a life of love be calling to it. Christ and His grace are yours if you will, but the invitations and beseechings of His mercy, the constant drawings of His love, the all-embracing offers of His forgiveness, may be all in vain, if you do not grasp them and hold them fast by the hand of faith.

That personal act must be preceded by the message of His mighty love. Ever He sends such messages as heralds of His coming, just as He prepared the way for His own approach to the Apostle, by the words of our text. Our faith must follow His word. Our love can only be called forth by the manifestation of His. But His message must be followed by that personal act, else His word is spoken in vain, and there is no real union between our need and His fulness, nor any cleansing contact of His grace with our foulness.

Mark, too, the intensely individual character of that act of faith by which a man accepts Christ's grace. Friends and companions may bring the tidings of the



risen Lord's loving heart, but the actual closing with the Lord's mercy must be done by myself, alone with Him.

As if there were not another soul on earth, I and He must meet, and in solitude deep as that of death, each man for himself must yield to Incarnate Love, and receive eternal life. The flocks and herds, the wives and children, have all to be sent away, and Jacob must be left alone, before the mysterious Wrestler comes whose touch of fire lames the whole nature of sin and death, whose inbreathed power strengthens to hold Him fast till He speaks a blessing, who desires to be overcome, and makes our yielding to Him our prevailing with Him. As one of the old mystics called prayer 'the flight of the lonely man to the only God,' so we may call the act of faith the meeting of the soul alone with Christ alone. Do you know anything of that personal communion? Have you, your own very self, by your own penitence for your own sin, and your own thankful faith in the Love which thereby becomes truly yours, isolated yourself from all companionship, and joined yourself to Christ? Then, through that narrow passage where we can only walk singly, you will come into a large place. The act of faith, which separates us from all men, unites us for the first time in real brotherhood, and they who, one by one, come to Jesus and meet Him alone, next find that they 'are come to the city of God, to an innumerable company, to the festal choirs of angels, to the Church of the First-born, to the spirits of just men made perfect.'

III. Notice, finally, the gradual cure of the pardoned Apostle.

He was restored to his office, as we read in the sup-

plement to John's Gospel. In that wonderful conversation, full as it is of allusions to Peter's fall, Christ asks but one question, 'Lovest thou Me?' That includes everything. 'Hast thou learned the lesson of My mercy? hast thou responded to My love? then thou art fit for My work, and beginning to be perfected.' So the third stage in the triumph of Christ's love over man's sin is, when we, beholding that love flowing towards us, and accepting it by faith, respond to it with our own, and are able to say, 'Thou knowest that I love Thee.'

The all-embracing question is followed by an equally comprehensive command, 'Follow thou Me,' a two-worded compendium of all morals, a precept which naturally results from love, and certainly leads to absolute perfectness. With love to Christ for motive, and Christ Himself for pattern, and following Him for our one duty, all things are possible, and the utter defeat of sin in us is but a question of time.

And the certainty, as well as the gradual slowness, of that victory, are well set forth by the future history of the Apostle. We know how his fickleness passed away, and how his vehement character was calmed and consolidated into resolved persistency, and how his love of distinction and self-confidence were turned in a new direction, obeyed a divine impulse, and became powers. We read how he started to the front; how he guided the Church in the first stage of its development; how whenever there was danger he was in the van, and whenever there was work his hand was first on the plough; how he bearded and braved rulers and councils; how—more difficult still for him—he lay quietly in prison sleeping like a child, between his guards, on the night before his execution; how—most

difficult of all—he acquiesced in Paul's superiority; and, if he still needed to be withstood and blamed, could recognise the wisdom of the rebuke, and in his calm old age could speak well of the rebuker as his 'beloved brother Paul.' Nor was the cure a change in the great lines of his character. These remain the same, the characteristic excellences possible to them are brought out, the defects are curbed and cast out. The 'new man' is the 'old man' with a new direction, obeying a new impulse, but retaining its individuality. Weaknesses become strengths; the sanctified character is the old character sanctified; and it is still true that 'every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.'

It is very instructive to observe how deeply the experiences of his fall, and of Christ's mercy then, had impressed themselves on Peter's memory, and how constantly they were present with him all through his after-life. His Epistles are full of allusions which show this. For instance, to go a step further back in his life, he remembered that the Lord had said to him, 'Thou art Peter,' 'a stone,' and that his pride in that name had helped to his rash confidence, and so to his sin. Therefore, when he is cured of these, he takes pleasure in sharing his honour with his brethren, and writes, 'Ye also, as living stones, are built up.' He remembered the contempt for others and the trust in himself with which he had said, 'Though all should forsake Thee, yet will not I'; and, taught what must come of that, he writes, 'Be clothed with humility, for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.' He remembered how hastily he had drawn his sword and struck at Malchus, and he writes, 'If when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.' He

remembered how he had been surprised into denial by the questions of a sharp-tongued servant-maid, and he writes, 'Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness.' He remembered how the pardoning love of his Lord had honoured him unworthy, with the charge, 'Feed My sheep,' and he writes, ranking himself as one of the class to whom he speaks—'The elders I exhort, who am also an elder . . . feed the flock of God.' He remembered that last command, which sounded ever in his spirit, 'Follow thou Me,' and discerning now, through all the years that lay between, the presumptuous folly and blind inversion of his own work and his Master's which had lain in his earlier question, 'Why cannot I follow Thee now? I will lay down my life for Thy sake'—he writes to all, 'Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps.'

So well had he learned the lesson of his own sin, and of that immortal love which had beckoned him back, to peace at its side and purity from its hand. Let us learn how the love of Christ, received into the heart, triumphs gradually but surely over all sin, transforms character, turning even its weakness into strength, and so, from the depths of transgression and very gates of hell, raises men to God.

To us all this divine message speaks. Christ's love is extended to us; no sin can stay it; no fall of ours can make Him despair. He will not give us up. He waits to be gracious. This same Peter once asked, 'How oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?' And the answer, which commanded unwearied brotherly forgiveness, revealed inexhaustible divine pardon—'I say not unto thee until seven times, but

until seventy times seven.' The measure of the divine mercy, which is the pattern of ours, is completeness ten times multiplied by itself; we know not the numbers thereof. 'Let the wicked forsake his way . . . and let him return unto the Lord, for He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will multiply to pardon.'

## ‘FIRST TO MARY’

‘... He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven devils.’—MARK XVI. 9.

A GREAT pile of legend has been built on the one or two notices of Mary Magdalene in Scripture. Art, poetry, and philanthropy have accepted and inculcated these, till we almost feel as if they were bits of the Bible. But there is not the shadow of a foundation for them. She has generally been identified with the woman in Luke’s Gospel ‘who was a sinner.’ There is no reason at all for that identification. On the contrary, there is a reason against it, in the fact that immediately after that narrative she is named as one of the little band of women who ministered to Jesus.

Here is all that we know of her: that Christ cast out the seven devils; that she became one of the Galilean women, including the mothers of Jesus and of John, who ‘ministered to Him of their substance’; that she was one of the Marys at the Cross and saw the interment; that she came to the sepulchre, heard the angel’s message, went to John with it, came back and stood without at the sepulchre, saw the Lord, and, having heard His voice and clasped His feet, returned to the little company, and then she drops out of the narrative and is no more named. That is all. It is enough. There are large lessons in this fact which Mark (or whoever wrote this chapter) gives with such emphasis, ‘He appeared first to Mary Magdalene.’

Think what the Resurrection is—how stupendous and wonderful! Who *might* have been expected to be its witnesses? But see! the first eye that beholds is this

poor sin-stained woman's. What a distance between the two extremes of her experience—devil-ridden and gazing on the Risen Saviour!

I. An example of the depth to which the soul of man can descend.

This fact of possession is very obscure and strange. I doubt whether we can understand it. But I cannot see how we can bring it down to the level of mere disease without involving Jesus Christ in the charge of consciously aiding in upholding what, if it be not an awful truth, is one of the grimmest, ghastliest superstitions that ever terrified men.

In all ways He gives in His adhesion to the fact of demoniacal possession. He speaks *to* the demons, and *of* them, rebukes them, holds conversations with them, charges them to be silent. He distinguishes between possession and diseases. 'Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead'—these commands bring together forms of sickness running its course; why should He separate from them His next command and endowment, 'cast out devils,' unless because He regarded demoniacal possession as separate from sickness in any form? He sees in His casting of them out the triumph over the personal power of evil. 'I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.' But while the fact seems to be established, the thing is only known to us by its signs. These were madness, melancholy, sometimes dumbness, sometimes fits and convulsions; the man was dominated by an alien power; there was a strange, awful double consciousness; 'We are many,' 'My name is Legion.' There was absolute control by this alien power, which like some parasitical worm had rooted itself within the poor wretch, and there lived upon his blood and life

juices—only that it lived in the spirit, dominated the will, and controlled the nature.

Probably there had always been the yielding to the impulse to sin of some sort, or at any rate the man had opened the door for the devil to come in.

This woman had been in the deepest depths of this awful abyss. 'Seven' is the numerical symbol of completeness, so she had been utterly devil-ridden. And she had once been a little child in some Galilean home, and parents had seen her budding beauty and early, gentle, womanly ways. And now, think of the havoc! the distorted face, the foul words, the blasphemous thoughts!

And is this worse than our sinful case? Are not the devils that possess us as real and powerful?

## II. An example of the cleansing power of Christ.

We know nothing about how she had come under His merciful eye, nor any of the circumstances of her healing; but only that this woman, with whom the serpent was so closely intertwined, as in some pictures of Eve's temptation, was not beyond His reach, and was set free. Note—

There is *no* condition of human misery which Christ cannot alleviate.

None is so sunk in sin that He cannot redeem them.

For all in the world there is hope.

Look on the extremest forms of sin. We can regard them all with the assurance that Christ can cleanse them—prostitutes, thieves, respectable worldlings.

None is so bad as to have lost His love.

None is so bad as to be excluded from the purpose of His death.

None is so bad as to be beyond the reach of His cleansing power.



None has wandered so far that he cannot come back.

Think of the earliest believers—a thief, a 'woman that was a sinner,' this Mary, a Zacchæus, a persecuting Paul, a rude, rough jailer, etc.

Remember Paul's description of a class of the Corinthian saints—'such were some of you.'

As long as man is man, so long is God ready to receive him back. There is no place where sun does not shine. No heart is given over to irremediable hardness. None ever comes to Christ in vain.

The Saviour is greater than all our sins.

The deliverance is more than sufficient for the worst.

'God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham.'

Ezekiel's vision of dry bones.

III. An example of how the remembrance of past and pardoned sin may be a blessing.

Mary evidently tried always to be beside Him. The cure had been perfect, but perhaps there was a tremulous fear, as in the man that prayed 'that he might be with Him.'

And so, look how all the notices give us one picture of a heart set on Him. There were—

(a) Consciousness of weakness, that made her long for His presence as a security.

(b) Deep love, that made her long for His presence as a joy.

(c) Thankful gratitude, that made her long for opportunities to serve Him.

And this is what the remembrance of Jesus should be to us.

IV. An example of how the most degraded may rise highest in fellowship with Christ.

‘First’ to her, because she needed Him and longed for Him.

Now this is but an illustration of the great principle that by God’s mercy sin when it is hated and pardoned may be made to subserve our highest joys.

It is not sin which separates us from God, but it is unpardoned sin. Not that the more we sin the more we are fit for Him, for all sin is loss. There are ways in which even forgiven and repented sin may injure a man. But there is nothing in it to hinder our coming close to the Saviour and enjoying all the fulness of His love, so that if we use it rightly it may become a help.

If it leads us to that clinging of which we have just spoken, then we shall come nearer to God for it.

The divine presence is always given to those who long for it.

Sin may help to kindle such longings.

He who has been almost dead in the wilderness will keep near the guide. The man that has been starved with cold in Arctic night will prize the glory and grace of sunshine in fairer lands.

Instances in Church history—Paul, Augustine, Bunyan.

‘Publicans and harlots go into the kingdom before you.’

The noblest illustration is in heaven, where men lead the song of Redemption.

God uses sin as a black background on which the brightest rainbow tints of His mercy are displayed.

You can come to this Saviour whatever you have been. I say to no man, ‘Sin, for it does not matter.’ But I do say, ‘If you are conscious of sin, deep, dark, damning, that makes no barrier between you and God.

**You may come all the nearer for it if you will let your past teach you to long for His love and to lean on Him.'**

**'He appeared first to Mary Magdalene,' and those who stand nearest the throne and lead the anthems of heaven, and look up with undazzled angels' faces to the God of their joy, whose name blazes on their foreheads, all these were guilty, sinful men. But they 'have washed their robes and made them white.' There will be in heaven some of the worst sinners that ever lived on earth. There will not be one out of whom He has not 'cast seven devils.'**

## THE WORLD-WIDE COMMISSION

‘Every creature.’—MARK xvi. 15.

THE missionary enterprise has been put on many bases. People do not like commandments, but yet it is a great relief and strength to come back to one, and answer all questions with ‘He bids me!’

Now, these words of our Lord open up the whole subject of the Universality of Christianity.

### I. The divine audacity of Christianity.

Take the scene. A mere handful of men, whether ‘the twelve’ or ‘the five hundred brethren’ is immaterial.

How they must have recoiled when they heard the sweeping command, ‘Go ye into all the world’! It is like the apparent absurdity of Christ’s quiet word: ‘They need not depart; give ye them to eat,’ when the only visible stock of food was ‘five loaves and two small fishes.’ As on that occasion, so in this final commandment they had to take Christ’s presence into account. ‘I am with you.’

So note the obviously world-wide extent of Christ’s claim of dominion. He had come into the world, to begin with, that ‘the world through Him might be saved.’ ‘If any man thirst, let him come.’ The parables of the kingdom of heaven are planned on the same grand scale. ‘I will draw all men unto Me.’ It cannot be disputed that Jesus ‘lived and moved and had His being’ in this vision of universal dominion.

Here emerges the great contrast of Christianity with Judaism. Judaism was intolerant, as all merely monotheistic faiths must be, and sure of future uni-

versality, but it was not proselytising—not a missionary faith. Nor is it so to-day. It is exclusive and unprogressive still.

Mohammedanism in its fiery youth, because monotheistic was aggressive, but it enforced outward profession only, and left the inner life untouched. So it did not scruple to persecute as well as to proselytise. Christianity is alone in calmly setting forth a universal dominion, and in seeking it by the Word alone. 'Put up thy sword into its sheath.'

## II. The foundations of this bold claim.

Christ's sole and singular relation to the whole race. There are profound truths embodied in this relation.

(a) There is implied the adequacy of Christ for all. He is *for* all, because He is the only and all-sufficient Saviour. By His death He offered satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. 'Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else.' 'Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name,' etc.

(b) The divine purpose of mercy for all. 'God will have all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth.'

(c) The adaptation of the Gospel message to all. It deals with all men as on one level. It addresses universal humanity. 'Unto you, O men, I call, and My voice is to the sons of men.' It speaks the same language to all sorts of men, to all stages of society, and in all ages. Christianity has no esoteric doctrine, no inner circle of the 'initiated.' Consequently it introduces a new notion of the unity of humanity, and knows nothing of privileged classes.

Note the history of Christianity in its relation to slavery, and to inferior and down-trodden races.

Christianity has no belief in the existence of 'irreclaimable outcasts,' but proclaims and glories in the possibility of winning any and all to the love which makes godlike. There is one Saviour, and so there is only one Gospel for 'all the world.'

### III. Its vindication in facts.

The history of the diffusion of the Gospel at first is significant. Think of the varieties of civilisation it approached and absorbed. See how it overcame the bonds of climate and language, etc. How unlike the Europe of to-day is to the Europe of Paul's time!

In this twentieth century Christianity does not present the marks of an expiring superstition.

Note, further, that the history of missions vindicates the world-wide claim of the Gospel. Think of the wonderful number of converts in the first fifty years of gospel preaching. The Roman empire was Christianised in three centuries! Recall the innumerable testimonies down to date; *e.g.* the absolute abandonment of idols in the South Sea Islands, the weakening of caste in India, the romance of missions in Central Africa, etc. etc.

The character, too, of modern converts is as good as was that of Paul's. The gospel in this century produces everywhere fruits like those which it brought forth in Asia and Europe in the first century. The success has been in every field. None has been abandoned as hopeless. The Moravians in Greenland. The Hottentots. The Patagonians (Darwin's testimony). Christianity has constantly appealed to all classes of society. Not many 'noble,' but some in every age and land.

### IV. The practical duty.

'Go ye and preach.' The matter is literally left in

our hands. Jesus has returned to the throne. Ere departing He announces the distinct command. There it is, and it is age-long in its application,—‘Preach!’ that is the one gospel weapon. Tell of the name and the work of ‘God manifest in the flesh.’ First ‘evangelise,’ then ‘disciple the nations.’ Bring *to* Christ, then build up *in* Christ. There are no other orders. Let there be boundless trust in the divine gospel, and it will vindicate itself in every mission-field. Let us think imperially of ‘Christ and the Church.’ Our anticipations of success should be world-wide in their sweep.

As when they kindle the festival lamps round the dome of St. Peter’s, there is a first twinkling spot here and another there, and gradually they multiply till they outline the whole in an unbroken ring of light, so ‘one by one’ men will enter the kingdom, till at last ‘every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.’

‘He shall reign from shore to shore,  
With illimitable sway.’

## THE ENTHRONED CHRIST

'So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.'—MARK'xvi. 19.

How strangely calm and brief is this record of so stupendous an event! Do these sparing and reverent words sound to you like the product of devout imagination, embellishing with legend the facts of history? To me their very restrainedness, calmness, matter-of-factness, if I may so call it, are a strong guarantee that they are the utterance of an eyewitness, who verily saw what he tells so simply. There is something sublime in the contrast between the magnificence and almost inconceivable grandeur of the thing communicated, and the quiet words, so few, so sober, so wanting in all detail, in which it is told.

That stupendous fact of Christ sitting at the right hand of God is the one that should fill the present for us all, even as the Cross should fill the past, and the coming for Judgment should fill the future. So for us the one central thought about the present, in its loftiest relations, should be the throned Christ at God's right hand. It is to that thought of the session of Jesus by the side of the Majesty of the Heavens that I wish to turn now, to try to bring out the profound teaching that is in it, and the practical lessons which it suggests. I desire to emphasise very briefly four points, and to see, in Christ's sitting at the right hand, the revelation of these things:—The exalted Man, the resting Saviour, the interceding Priest, and the ever-active Helper.



I. First, then, in that solemn and wondrous fact of Christ's sitting at the right hand of God, we have the exalted Man.

We are taught to believe, according to His own words, that in His ascension Christ was but returning whence He came, and entering into the 'glory which He had with the Father before the world was.' And that impression of a return to His native and proper abode is strongly conveyed to us by the narrative of His ascension. Contrast it, for instance, with the narrative of Elijah's rapture, or with the brief reference to Enoch's translation. The one was taken by God up into a region and a state which he had not formerly traversed; the other was borne by a fiery chariot to the heavens; but Christ slowly sailed upwards, as it were, by His own inherent power, returning to His abode, and ascending up where He was before.

But whilst this is one side of the profound fact, there is another side. What was new in Christ's return to His Father's bosom? This, that He took His Manhood with Him. It was 'the Everlasting Son of the Father,' the Eternal Word, which from the beginning 'was with God and was God,' that came down from heaven to earth, to declare the Father; but it was the Incarnate Word, the Man Christ Jesus, that went back again. This most blessed and wonderful truth is taught with emphasis in His own words before the Council, 'Ye shall see the Son of *Man* sitting on the right hand of power.' Christ, then, to-day, bears a human body, not, indeed, the 'body of His humiliation,' but the body of His glory, which is none the less a true corporeal frame, and necessarily requires a locality. His ascension, whithersoever He may have gone, was the true carrying of a real humanity, complete in all its parts,

Body, Soul, and Spirit, up to the very throne of God.

Where that locality is it is bootless to speculate. Scripture says that He ascended up 'far above all heavens'; or, as the Epistle to the Hebrews has it, in the proper translation, the High Priest 'is passed *through* the heavens,' as if all this visible material creation was rent asunder in order that He might soar yet higher beyond its limits wherein reign mutation and decay. But wheresoever that place may be, there is a place in which now, with a human body as well as a human spirit, Jesus is sitting 'at the right hand of God.'

Let us thankfully think how, in the profound language of Scripture, 'the Forerunner is for us entered'; how, in some mysterious manner, of which we can but dimly conceive, that entrance of Jesus in His complete humanity into the highest heavens is the preparation of a place for us. It seems as if, without His presence there, there were no entrance for human nature within that state, and no power in a human foot to tread upon the crystal pavements of the celestial City, but where He is, there the path is permeable, and the place native, to all who love and trust Him.

We may stand, therefore, with these disciples, and looking upwards as the cloud receives Him out of our sight, our faith follows Him, still our Brother, still clothed with humanity, still wearing a bodily frame; and we say, as we lose Him from our vision, 'What is man'? Capable of being lifted to the most intimate participation in the glories of divinity, and though he be poor and weak and sinful here, yet capable of union and assimilation with the Majesty that is on high. For what Christ's Body is, the bodies of them that love and

serve Him shall surely be, and He, the Forerunner, is entered there for us; that we too, in our turn, may pass into the light, and walk in the full blaze of the divine glory; as of old the children in the furnace were, unconsumed, because companioned by 'One like unto the Son of Man.'

The exalted Christ, sitting at the right hand of God, is the Pattern of what is possible for humanity, and the prophecy and pledge of what will be actual for all that love Him and bear the image of Him upon earth, that they may be conformed to the image of His glory, and be with Him where He is. What firmness, what reality, what solidity this thought of the exalted bodily Christ gives to the else dim and vague conceptions of a Heaven beyond the stars and beyond our present experience! I believe that no doctrine of a future life has strength and substance enough to survive the agonies of our hearts when we part from our dear ones, the fears of our spirits when we look into the unknown, inane future for ourselves; except only this which says Heaven is Christ and Christ is Heaven, and points to Him and says, 'Where He is, there and that also shall His servants be.'

II. Now, secondly, look at Christ's sitting at the right hand of God as presenting to our view the Resting Saviour.

That session expresses the idea of absolute repose after sore conflict. It is the same thought which is expressed in those solemn Egyptian colossal statues of deified conquerors, elevated to mysterious union with their gods, and yet men still, sitting before their temples in perfect stillness, with their mighty hands lying quiet on their restful limbs; with calm faces out of which toil and passion and change seem to have melted, gazing out

with open eyes as over a silent, prostrate world. So, with the Cross behind, with all the agony and weariness of the arena, the dust and the blood of the struggle, left beneath, He 'sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.'

The rest of the Christ after His Cross is parallel with and carries the same meaning as the rest of God after the Creation. Why do we read 'He rested on the seventh day from all His works'? Did the Creative Arm grow weary? Was there toil for the divine nature in the making of a universe? Doth He not speak and it is done? Is not the calm, effortless forthputting of His will the cause and the means of Creation? Does any shadow of weariness steal over that life which lives and is not exhausted? Does the bush consume in burning? Surely not. He rested from His works, not because He needed to recuperate strength after action by repose, but because the works were perfect, and in sign and token that His ideal was accomplished, and that no more was needed to be done.

And, in like manner, the Christ rests after His Cross, not because He needed repose even after that terrible effort, or was panting after His race, and so had to sit there to recover, but in token that His work was finished and perfected, that all which He had come to do was done; and in token, likewise, that the Father, too, beheld and accepted the finished work. Therefore, the session of Christ at the right hand of God is the proclamation from Heaven of what He cried with His last dying breath upon the Cross: 'It is finished!' It is the declaration that the world has had all done for it that Heaven can do for it. It is the declaration that all which is needed for the regeneration of humanity has been lodged in the very heart of

the race, and that henceforward all that is required is the evolving and the development of the consequences of that perfect work which Christ offered upon the Cross. So the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews contrasts the priests who stood 'daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices' which 'can never take away sin,' with 'this Man who, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down at the right hand of God'; testifying thereby that His Cross is the complete, sufficient, perpetual atonement and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. So we have to look back to that past as interpreted by this present, to that Cross as commented upon by this Throne, and to see in it the perfect work which any human soul may grasp, and which all human souls need, for their acceptance and forgiveness. The Son of Man set at the right hand of God is Christ's declaration, 'I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do,' and is also God's declaration, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

III. Once more, we see here, in this great fact of Christ sitting at the right hand of God, the interceding Priest.

So the Scripture declares. The Epistle to the Hebrews over and over again reiterates that thought that we have a Priest who has 'passed into the heavens,' there to 'appear in the presence of God for us.' And the Apostle Paul, in that great linked climax in the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, has it, 'Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.' There are deep mysteries connected with that thought of the intercession of Christ. It does not mean that the divine

heart needs to be won to love and pity. It does not mean that in any mere outward and formal fashion Christ pleads with God, and softens and placates the Infinite and Eternal love of the Father in the heavens. It, at least, plainly means this, that He, our Saviour and Sacrifice, is for ever in the presence of God; presenting His own blood as an element in the divine dealing with us, modifying the incidence of the divine law, and securing through His own merits and intercession the outflow of blessings upon our heads and hearts. It is not a complete statement of Christ's work for us that He died for us. He died that He might have somewhat to offer. He lives that He may be our Advocate as well as our propitiation with the Father. And just as the High Priest once a year passed within the curtain, and there in the solemn silence and solitude of the holy place sprinkled the blood that he bore thither, not without trembling, and but for a moment permitted to stay in the awful Presence, thus, but in reality and for ever, with the joyful gladness of a Son in His 'own calm home, His habitation from eternity,' Christ *abides* in the Holy Place; and, at the right hand of the Majesty of the Heavens, lifts up that prayer, so strangely compact of authority and submission: 'Father, I *will* that these whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am.' The Son of Man at the right hand of God is our Intercessor with the Father. 'Seeing, then, that we have a great High Priest that is passed through the heavens, let us come boldly to the Throne of Grace.'

IV. Lastly, this great fact sets before us the ever-active Helper.

The 'right hand of God' is the Omnipotent energy of God; and howsoever certainly the language of Scrip-

ture requires for its full interpretation that we should firmly hold that Christ's glorified body dwells in a place, we are not to omit the other thought that to sit at the right hand also means to wield the immortal energy of that divine nature, over all the field of the Creation, and in every province of His dominion. So that the ascended Christ is the ubiquitous Christ; and He who is 'at the right hand of God' is wherever the power of God reaches throughout His whole Universe.

Remember, too, that it was once given to a man to look through the opened heavens (through which Christ had 'passed') and to 'see the Son of Man standing'—not sitting—'at the right hand of God.' Why to the dying protomartyr was there granted that vision thus varied? Wherefore was the attitude changed but to express the swiftness, the certainty of His help, and the eager readiness of the Lord, who starts to His feet, as it were, to succour and to sustain His dying servant?

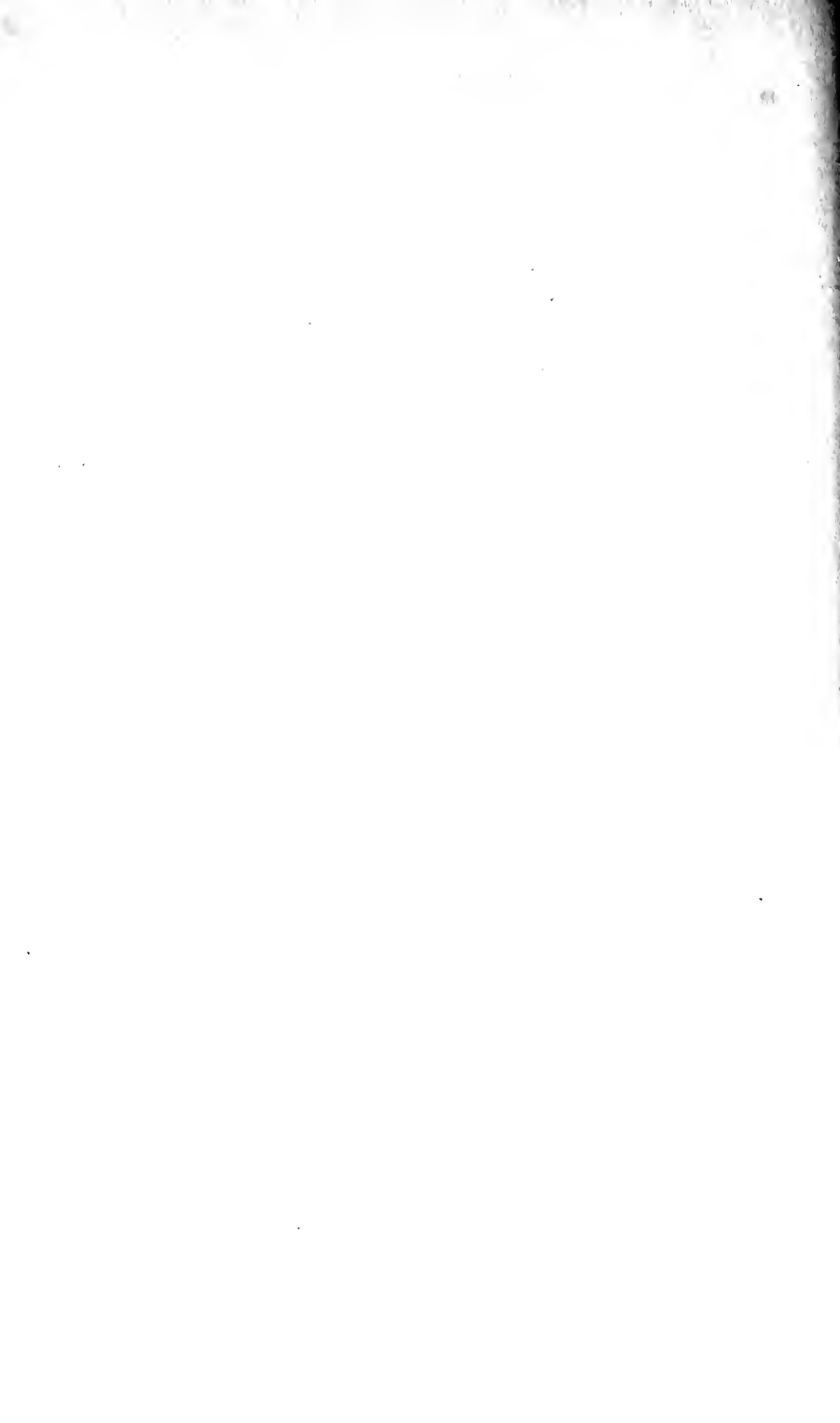
And so, dear friends, we may take that great joyful truth that both as receiving 'gifts for men' and bestowing gifts upon them, and as working by His providence in the world, and on the wider scale for the well-being of His children and of the Church, the Christ who sits at the right hand of God wields, ever with eager cheerfulness, all the powers of omnipotence for our well-being, if we love and trust Him. We may look quietly upon all perplexities and complications, because the hands that were pierced for us hold the helm and the reins, because the Christ who is our Brother is the King, and sits supreme at the centre of the Universe. Joseph's brethren, that came up in their hunger and their rags to Egypt, and found their brother next

the throne, were startled with a great joy of surprise, and fears were calmed, and confidence sprang in their hearts. Shall not we be restful and confident when our Brother, the Son of Man, sits ruling all things? 'We see not yet all things put under' us, 'but we see Jesus,' and that is enough.

So the ascended Man, the resting Saviour and His completed work, the interceding Priest, and the ever-active Helper, are all brought before us in this great and blessed thought, 'Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.' Therefore, dear friends, set your affection on things above. Our hearts travel where our dear ones are. Oh how strange and sad it is that professing Christians whose lives, if they are Christians at all, have their roots and are hid with Christ in God, should turn so few, so cold thoughts and loves thither! Surely 'where your treasure is there will your heart be also.' Surely if Christ is your Treasure you will feel that with Him is home, and that this is a foreign land. 'Set your affection,' then, 'on things above,' while life lasts, and when it is ebbing away, perhaps to our eyes too Heaven may be opened, and the vision of the Son of Man standing to receive and to welcome us may be granted. And when it has ebbed away, His will be the first voice to welcome us, and He will lift us to share in His glorious rest, according to His own wondrous promise, 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My Throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His Throne.'

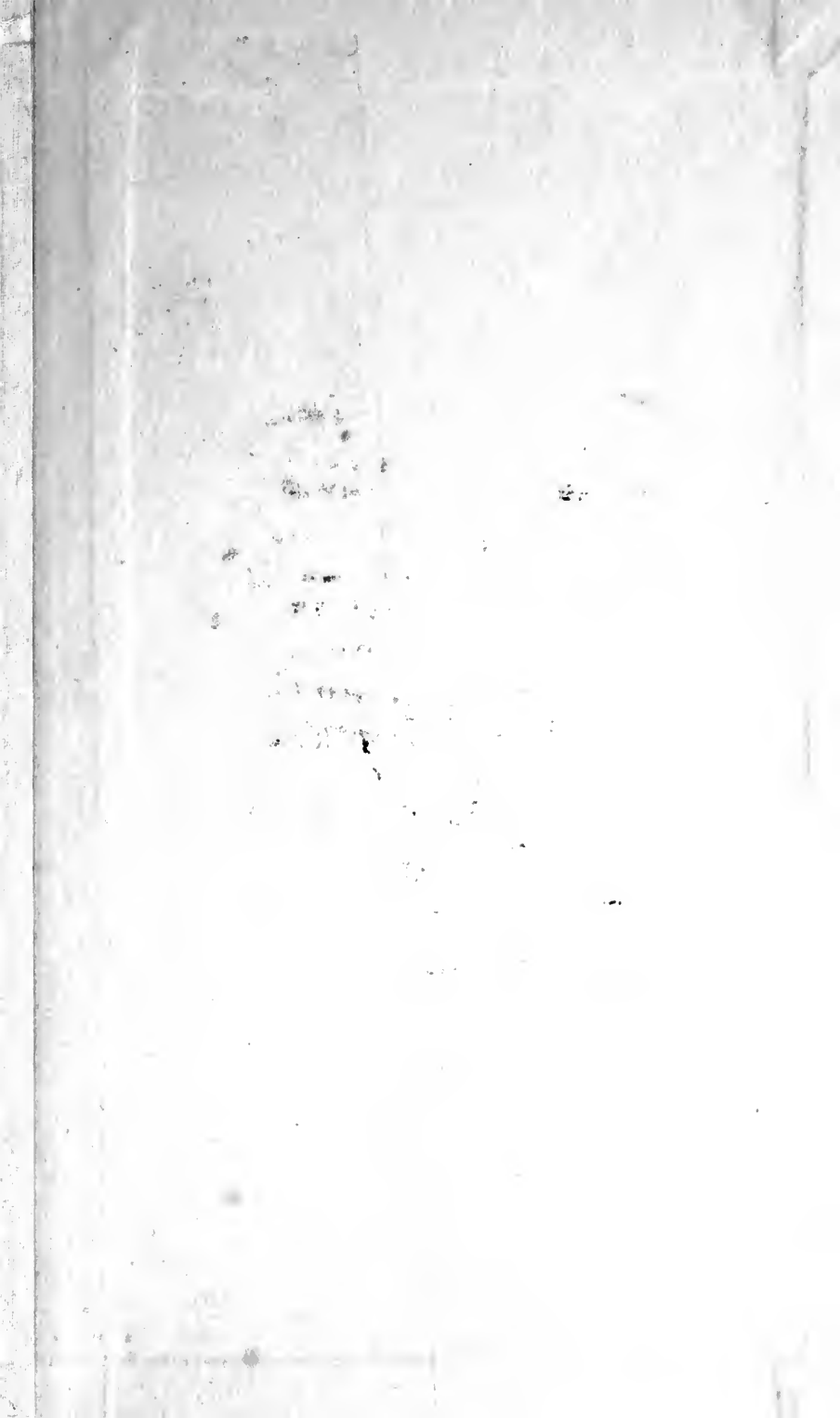








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